

Art

in

The Age of Anxiety

PAUL RHOADS



ART IN THE AGE OF ANXIETY

Paul Rhoads

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PREFACE & DEDICATION

This book, which I wrote in the fall of 2023, is witness to a uniquely strange age — the age, as it has been called, of anxiety. There have been times and places when art has counted for little. But never before has art simultaneously, or so massively, been prized, promoted and subsidized; and never before has a society ordained that everyone can, and even must be a creator — at peril of existential shame. For this would-be painter it has been a solitary and difficult time.

I am old enough to remember when painters were passionately and collectively interested in the movement (not plural) of the day and each other's work, when museums were not yet commercial enterprises but temples of contemplative communion with the old masters. Such days may not return, but what of painting itself?

Is this book a philosophy of art? It might be a science of art — except that it postulates, not that science is necessarily the enemy of art, but certainly that science is non-artistic. I hope it can be a guide for young painters in perplexity such as, half a century ago, was I — as well as for anyone interested in the question, so vexed in our time, of art.

Peering through the fog of our contemporary era since the 1960s, this is what I have learned, from painting itself, which can be written down, for painting, like all the arts, involves much that is beyond words. It is hopefully dedicated to the young painters I know, and those I do not.

NOTE on the ILLUSTRATIONS & TEXT

The illustrations are small, in black and white, and mostly without captions. Explanation or reference will mostly be found in the surrounding text. They are there merely as helpful hints.

A date in parentheses after the title of a work of is date of creation, after the name of an artist, date of birth.

This book uses special jargon to deal with technical painting matters, and uses certain familiar terms in unfamiliar ways. A Glossary of Jargon is provided for reference.

In the spirit of dada, this proper name and its derivatives are never capitalized, even at the beginning of a sentence. Neo-Dada, not being in that spirit, is capitalized.



'Archemedian Excogitation' George Rhoads, 1987 audio-kinetic sclupture Boston Museum of Science



'New York Sunset' George Rhoads, 1995, oil on wood.



Paul Rhoads self portrait, 1993

An American painter, sculptor, composer and youtuber from New York, Paul Rhoads has previously published 'What is Art' (including essays on Heidegger) and articles in 'The Muse Commands' (magazine about painting). He was editor-in-chief of the Vance Integral Edition and has published a collection of essays 'Winged Being: Thoughts on Jack Vance and Patient Explanations of the Obvious'. He lives in France.

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EMERGENT REALITY

When the word "Art" is spoken, what is meant has certainly altered in recent times. Surveying the story of Art from the cave paintings and petroglyphs of prehistory to the abstractions, conceptualization, mechanical reproductions and performances which currently preoccupy the millions worldwide who observe or constitute the art world, we see a succession of cultural phenomena rooted in, and expressive of, their time — perhaps even generative of their time. These cultural phenomena are understood to arise unconsciously out of the culture itself, or to be the gift of a particularly creative individual. In either case it is something coming into being out of nothing. Its advent is mysterious or god-like.

Art thus understood is unbounded by form, in any sense that art forms were previously understood, as we see when feces is recognized as art as much as any painting in a museum. In 2016 one of the 90 tins of 'Artist's Shit' produced by Piero Manzoni in 1961, sold for \$275,000; a price matching those of old master paintings sold contemporaneously.

Such creators are celebrated for the meaning they bring into the world. The value of that meaning is its apparently ex niliho origin because art is revelation of an emerging mystery. The present manifestation of that emergence obscures its past manifestations just as its future states are inconceivable. Its current manifestation is mysterious also, and only art which is sufficiently ex niliho qualifies as actually relevant creation. The part of contemporary creation which is relevant reveals, or even determines, what is variously called our "culture", "world view" or "zeitgeist". These terms indicate present civilizational conditions and the attitudes that produce or proceed from them. They embody evolving definitions of the Good, the Beautiful and the True (or meaningful) which are morally and intellectually relevant or even obligatory in the moment.

Art, then, is the sign of the times. This is particularly so inasmuch as art is often suggested to be the actual substance of our social or civilizational present, as we gather from such phrases as "culture is upstream from politics" which, less metaphorically, means that politics is determined by art. In a day and age when everything is seen to be political, from food to sex, from commerce to education, that is saying a lot. When artists hope, as now they often do, to "influence the zeitgeist", they are

suggesting that their art might determine the substance of civilization.

How do these god-like artists create ex-nihilo, unbounded by form or unaided by precedent?* Certain alleged discoveries in psychology provide the answer: man has an unconscious self, his most personal aspect, that which is most properly understood as self, as sui generis. Our personality, by contrast, our outer or self-conscious self is determined by social anxiety. Social anxiety motivates us to imitate those around us in dress, action, speech and thought. Adopting attitudes learned through imitation we remove ourselves from the mysterious flow of cultural vitality unfolding within and around us. We become a sort of zombie, seeming to live but not alive in the true sense, seeming to think but only imitating thought not our own.

Those persons — creators — who are actuated by the unconscious, artistic or god-like inner-self, who live with, in and by the flow of cultural vitality or arriving zeitgeist, can be recognized by absence of social anxiety. Their personalities are characterized by actions, dress, attitudes and speech which are unique to themselves. Their hair is some uncommon color, for example blue. They often dress in a distinctive color, such as Benedictine black. They declare opposition to ordinary attitudes. Their speech is characterized by unusual words, they give new meanings to common words, or speak a language known only to themselves. Their creations follow the same pattern of unexpected originality as their personalities, and the interest and importance of these creations is in inverse proportion to our capacity to recognize and understand them.

As for appreciating such art, it is a delicate matter since it is difficult, if not impossible, to get reliable reports about the appreciation of artifacts which by their very nature are inappreciable. But since they are signs of the times, or even the source of the 'cultural' moment, or zeitgeist, failure to appreciate them betrays lack of sensitivity to emergent reality. Persons lacking such sensitivity are out of touch, activated by social anxiety, and might as well be machines or oxen. On the other hand appreciation of such work — or a stance of appreciation, since by definition it cannot be appreciated — marks the appreciator as in touch with emergent reality, a creative person himself, motivated by his inner self or, to borrow

^{*} By 'form' I mean forms of art such as painting, sculpture, etching, etc. Precedent refers to how, until 1960, painters for example, however innovative, based their work to one extent or another on that of older artists.

a word from the 1950s, hip. Such a person is a surfer on the waves of mysterious meaning, the flow of life-giving Time into the present moment which, like the taste of salt in sea water, gives to the present that which makes it itself, what constitutes the zeitgeist, the culture, or the current reality of our world.

Because it is practically obligatory — non-appreciators are existential ciphers — the stance of appreciation is both crucial and precarious, and itself a source of social anxiety unique to our present situation. Necessity being the mother of invention, physical and psychological clues (theater) supply what words cannot and, one way and another, people manage to maintain the stance. Those who can speak a language known only to themselves are exempt from this dilemma, though that talent has its own challenges.

The preceding is an attempt to describe precisely what is claimed for art by its proponents, and how it is received in practice. This view of art is distinguished from the superseded view in a notable way. In the current view genuine or authentic work is unique and original. Such work brings with it, or contains within itself, the values which make it itself. Each such work is its own validation. Such art cannot be measured by values outside itself, or by values common to all. Such values would be products of social anxiety, imitation, or herd-like mindlessness, which is the antithesis of creativity. Such values are unrelated to emergent reality which is perpetually new and mysterious. Each authentic work of art is a world unto itself, a node or moment, thanks to which other sorts of creators — curators, gallerists, collectors, investors, historians, critics and museum goers — can demonstrate their own creator-status through the stance of appreciation. Relevant creations, and consciousness of their validity, constitutes, or reflects, the emergent reality.

If the future is inconceivable, and if the present is at best difficult to understand through the fog of social anxiety or preconditioning, knowing or understanding the past is a paradoxical problem. It is known because its artifacts are with us, even familiar to us, but the previous emergent reality, which occasioned their creation, has been eclipsed by the present emerging reality. Art of the past, then, is both known because familiar, and unknown because the current emergent reality, or zeitgeist, determines our attitudes and orientation so that previous realities are no longer meaningful or even comprehensible to us, because the values

on which they are based are mysteriously different from those of the present. We can see the older art but we cannot genuinely appreciate it because it is the product of a different world, a separate zeitgeist, one to which we, creatures of our present, can have no meaningful access.

The past, meanwhile, the art of the past in particular, is the most important source of social anxiety and therefore the most important obstacle to genuine existence. Previous generations, appreciating the art of their own time, and sharing the values it propagated, are imitated by the generations they raise. This imitation, reinforced by the persistence of old artifacts, accumulates like a sticky residue over the inner selves of developing persons to form the false, sterile, backward looking, unaware and uncreative crust of social anxiety — eagerness to imitate others, to copy the dead past and live by worn out standards and rules which are nothing but uncomprehended fragments of a time gone and irrelevant.

Just as the art of the present is non-hierarchical (except when it comes to money) so all periods of past art, each generated by, or generating, the mysterious emergence of their own times, have no hierarchical relations. Therefore there is no pan-historical measure by which to compare them. Each period is sui generis, the source of its own values which are incommensurate with those of other periods.

On the other hand there is one period distinguished from all the others, a particular period to which we must owe allegiance, not because we share or appreciate its values—though inevitably we do—but because it is the very source of our own values. This is the present period; willynilly we must assign to it a status higher than the others. We owe nothing to all previous periods but we owe everything, the very values by which we live, to the present.

The anti-past feeling which characterizes the world of Contemporary Art is easy to understand. The past, with all its ramifications and artifacts, is unrelated to the actually emerging reality. It is therefore irrelevant and also the source of social anxiety. The irrelevance of the past exacerbates the problem of social anxiety — attachment to tradition, reverence for familiar and well known forms, desire to emulate dead artists and so on — for were social anxiety based on values which had at least some relevance and life, it might be less pernicious and soul killing. The irrelevant past is relevant in one way: as a source of social anxiety. As such it deserves destruction or at least condescension.

So, there are two understandings of art. The present understanding, which I have sketched above, and the previous understanding which has been eclipsed by the emergent reality, and condemned by the same as a dead and irrelevant product of social anxiety. If the present understanding is reliable, the previous understanding has two qualities: lifeless, irrelevant worthlessness and unknowable unrecoverability. One may wonder how the present understanding can claim that the previous understanding has both qualities: worthlessness but also, as the product of other emergent realities than our own, unknowableness. For if it is unknowable, how can it be judged in any way, and as irrelevant in particular?

The idea that only the present zeitgeist is knowable may be true but it is only doctrine, and the pretension to judge the past (as worthless) contradicts that doctrine.

However this may be, the fact is that spokesmen for the present understanding confidently declare the past both unknowable and irrelevant. Often, for example, they develop this argument by calling art made today irrelevant, when they think it is imitative of art of the past, arguing that the only source of relevance is the emergent reality of the present and its inherent values which, by definition, are radically different from those of the past. This devaluation of the past ranges from more or less contemptuous dismissal to destructive hate. The art of the past is recognized as having been relevant to its own time, to the reality of its emergence. But since past times are no longer relevant, art of the past is presently irrelevant, and worse than irrelevant because it is a distraction from the relevance of now, and a source of social anxiety.

How, given these attitudes and doctrines, can the present understanding and the previous understanding be brought into dialog? Condemnation or dismissal, to carry conviction, must have a basis. The grounds of the condemnation in question, as I have already explained, are that the values of a past emergent reality are necessarily irrelevant because each period is a unique and incommensurable force from which its own values flow. This may be true but how can we know it is true if no emergent reality of the past can be known? If we could know some other emergent reality we might discover, contrary to expectation, that it was, for example, fundamentally identical to the present reality despite artistic differences, or that it was superior because its values are better.

Here, proponents of emergent reality theory will ask: better on what grounds? Obviously the old values will be better in the context of their time, their own emergent reality. But what if old values turned out to be universal and transcendent? This can't be ruled out, for emergent reality theory itself is universal and transcendent—it pretends to understand the constant and permanent nature of emergent realities, namely that each embodies incommensurable values.

Consider this from the perspective of art. There are portraits of men from 14th century Italy which are painted with different kinds of paint, on different kinds of supports, than portraits of men from 19th century France. Yet both are instantly understandable as portraits of men! The present emergent reality pretends to the insight that all emergent realities are mutually unknowable but that the present reality is nonetheless superior, at least in the sense that it is the only one that is relevant, the only living source of value.

There is something suspect in pretending to know the past well enough to know it is worthless while simultaneously proclaiming it to be unknowable. It resembles a corrupt justice system which refuses to recognize evidence unfavorable to whatever cause it espouses, or makes up new rules favorable to that cause. On the other hand, new values do emerge. By the same token nothing but the authority, prestige or success of emergent reality theory obliges us to accept, without examination, the doctrine that nothing from the past can provide a value which transcends the pretensions of the present.

What prevents us from flaunting that authority, from holding that prestige and success in contempt? Nothing. But we choose to be respectful of that authority and success, though not servile, and will proceed on that basis.

Emergent realties are not digital; there is no abrupt and instantaneous switch from one to the next. They unfold one after another. There are transitional phases. For example, it is generally understood that the Rococo period preceded the Neoclassical period, that the former was exemplified by Boucher while the later was exemplified by David. David was a student of Boucher but if his early work cannot be qualified as Rococo, neither is it already recognizable as Neoclassical.

In the same way our Modernist period, or however we label it, though solidly established, stable and consistent since mid-20th century, went



The Death of Seneca, 1773, by Jacques Louis David

David had a family relation to Boucher, who was certainly his earliest teacher and influence. Boucher died when David was 22, three years before he made this third failed attempt to win the Rome prize. Though he was then at the academy studying with the Neoclassic Vien, David was still overwhelmingly under Boucher's influence. A salient feature of Boucher's Rococo influence, a feature absent from Neoclassicism, is the interplay of forms and light such that carefully calibrated areas of value form masses, composed of many figures or parts of figures, defining abstract shapes with distinct spatial relationships – some near, some far. This procedure helps a painting have a general form, which may be said to spiral vigorously into the space meanwhile defining large geometrical figures on the surface. Cubism does something similar in how it creates a powerful low relief with geometrical forms.



Parnassus, circa 1760, by Anton Raphael Mengs

This painting, by the first Neoclassic, is one of the most influential works in that new style which would sweep away Rococo in the space of a decade. Compared to the older style, composition is less important. The emphasis is on a noble mood of antique nostalgia and figures calculated to express Greek and Roman attitudes as they were understood at the time.

through a turbulent period from the mid-19th century until it was fully unfolded about a century later. During this period the emergent reality had aspects in common with both what we might loosely call Classical and Modernist art. Testimony from this period might offer insights on the older Classical period, from those who were nonetheless touched by emerging Modernism, in terms comprehensible to us moderns.

One such testimonial, falling in the center of the transitional period, is Joseph Conrad's 1897 preface to 'The Nigger of the Narcissus'. Here are some statements from that writing which exemplify what I have elaborated as the present emergent reality or Modernism:

[the artist] speaks to our . . . sense of mystery . . .

... the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region ... he finds ...

... to reach the secret spring of responsive emotion.

The artist appeals to that part of our being which... is gift and not an acquisition...

To snatch...from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life...

...art...creates the moral and emotional atmosphere of the place and time.

Conrad evokes the mysterious inner self, in contrasts to the outer personality which is not given but acquired through social anxiety. He insists on a causal relationship between artistic creation, and meaning and value: art "creates the moral atmosphere of place and time." He might mean that art shows the moral atmosphere — not that it is the source of the uniqueness of each time. But Conrad seems to have believed that each place and time has something like a unique emergent reality, a thought shared by the most radical proponent of emergent reality theory.

But going farther back than the beginnings of Modernism, we find countless expressions of certain Modernist ideas. In his 18th century 'Discourses' Sir Joshua Reynold's suggested that painters should attend to what brush strokes might suggest to them, or the value of the random and unintentional—almost a doctrine of the unconscious. In the 15th century Leonardo da Vinci urged painters to find inspiration in cracks in walls, or to be open to the unexpected and apparently meaningless as a source of ideas. There are even modernist ideas which were considered in antiquity. For example, here is a passage from Plato's 'Cratylus':

... as Protagoras said, when he asserted that man was the measure of all things; (and) that things are to me, such as they appear to me; and that, on the other hand, they are to you such, as (they appear) to you...*

Even if Plato rejected it, a doctrine of radical subjectivism was known to antiquity. If its theoretical basis is different from the Modernism considered here (it does not teach that time is the operative factor) for practical purposes it is identical to the doctrine of emergent reality.

However suggestive all this may be, and to say nothing of Plato, Conrad's thinking — as hinted in the carefully chosen phases given above — does not yet outline the modernist project in its ripened and finished form such as I have described it, even if it harmonizes with aspects of it.

On the other hand, at the very beginning of his preface Conrad writes this:

...art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential—their one illuminating and convincing quality—the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like . . . the scientist, seeks the truth . . .

Suddenly we are in a different world, a world of phenomena which, however more or less difficult to understand and express, nonetheless have the character of facts, timeless and universal. The artist is not a creator ex niliho but an investigator who must "render the highest kind of justice" to "facts". Conrad's injunction to the artist, to express "truth,

^{*} Burges, Works of Plato, vol. III, Henry G. Bohn, 1854, page 287, Cratylus 6.

manifold and one", appears to address not only artists here and now but all artists everywhere and always. We recognize this as something from another time; it is the older attitude, the attitude the current emergent reality has replaced. According to emergent reality doctrine such old ideas should be incomprehensible... yet they seem clear enough. Should emergent reality doctrine be allowed to decide the worth of the old reality?

Let us take another bold step into the past to see what, in the 12th century, Averroes had to say about these matters:

. . . Good and evil, beneficial and harmful, beautiful and ugly . . . [exist] by nature, not by supposition.*

Nothing could be farther from the doctrine of emergent reality, which Averroes dismisses as supposition. Reality — good, evil, beauty and ugliness — is not emergent but, according to Averroes, by nature. Or, to summarize the well known antique view, eternal and universal. Regarding the notion of emergent reality, the most that can be said for agreement between the antique and the modern view is that, according to the antique view, if nature — which is to say "reality" — did emerge, it did so only once and we live in the same reality as everyone else since as far back as we can imagine.

Now, if we accept that the opinion of Averroes on this matter is substantially identical to Plato's, and while Conrad's views may not be as resounding an endorsement of the idea of a universal and eternal cosmic order as we find in antiquity, still, such a statement as: "to find in the facts of life what is fundamental, enduring and essential, the very truth of existence", strongly suggests there was a view, which our friends might qualify as an opinion, based on a particular emergent reality, which appears to have persisted from at least 500 B.C. until about 1900, or twenty-four centuries. If we include the evidence of Egyptian art, which shows a numbing stylistic homogeneity over thousands of years, we might add those millennia to the persistence of the emerged reality in question.

Let us measure the period of the new emergent reality from 1960, as the point when it dominated in full glory and force without any admix-

^{* &#}x27;Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic', Cambridge University Press, 1956, 493c 505d

ture of the older outlook, such as we glimpse in Conrad. In that case we have left behind a dead and irrelevant reality which persisted for thousands of years, and presently are plunged into another reality—vital, relevant and new—for, as of this writing, sixty three years.

It is, of course, hopeless to evoke respect for quantity, to say nothing of traditional wisdom, in an argument where one side stands on rejection of the past and all its works as not only irrelevant but as actually unknowable. Contending that the past is unknowable, however, may be a step too far. Unless we are to entertain hysterical arguments to the effect that such words as "good" or "beauty" had so radically different a meaning twelve centuries ago that our reading of Averroes is necessarily gibberish compared to whatever it was he actually meant, we are obliged to admit, perhaps with some qualification, that the past is not simply a closed book, that we can attain at least some idea of what our ancestors thought, believed and felt.

I may be suspected of irony; I affirm, however, that the foregoing represents my sincere opinions and what I believe is a fair and sufficient description of the present outlook. I am not unaware that this outlook rests on more grounds than so far presented. Here is another: artistically the most compelling Modernist argument is the diversity of styles which characterize European painting from the 14th to the 20th centuries, or within what used to be called Modern painting, the era beginning with Cimabue and Giotto which succeeded Medieval or Byzantine art, a style which persisted for almost a thousand years from the fall of the Roman Empire.

Stylistic diversity has been the bread and butter of art historians since the 19th century. The approach has two modes:

A TALE OF INFLUENCE: artists and their styles arise from the art style they experience when young, and artists of importance are those who innovate, causing changes of style.

THE NON-ARTISTIC THEORY OF ART HISTORY: the diversity of styles is a function of evolving social, political and economic causes.

Both modes, while not equivalent to the present idea of the incommen-

surability of periods, nonetheless emphasize difference, and if not rupture, at least change. In the 19th century perspective these distinctions, however dramatic, never implied mutual incomprehension. Also the past was not condemned as irrelevant.

There is a third view of art history, characteristic of the early Modern period (1400-1800) which persisted, if with diminishing force, even into the 20th century. This view was typical of Medieval thinking. The Medieval period followed the fall of Rome. The dramatic decline of the arts caused by that event was present to Medieval minds as they marvelled at the ruins of the old civilization, its basilicas, aqueducts, world spanning roads and philosophical texts. They conceived of civilization on a scale: higher and lower, more or less civilized or barbaric, advanced or primitive, robust and virtuous or backward and decadent. They saw themselves as artistically undeveloped compared to the empire, but when the cathedral builders began to rival the ancients architecturally it was proudly regarded as civilizational progress; lost arts were being recovered, the old heights were again being scaled.

In the 15th century Modern painters, such as Bellini and Perugino (the teachers of Titian and Raphael) regarded themselves as striving to equal the achievements of the antique painters even if they were only known through the reports of Pliny. But when, thanks to Roman excavations, ancient statues were dug up and there were actual examples of antique art before their eyes, artists such as Raphael and Michelangelo were inspired to more direct emulation and progress; civilization, once again, was being not created but recreated, not made but restored.

The Renaissance understood itself as an era of progress in which the heights once attained by the ancients might again be reached. A new art was not emerging, the glories of antique art were shining forth once more. Art was a universal and eternal category to be practiced on as high a level as possible. This "lower and higher" attitude persisted, so that since the 18th century particularly, certain critics have complained that art is in decline, that decadence is putting out the lights of civilization. Such judgements, whatever they may be worth, are based on an understanding of art as a universal and eternal category, to be judged by how well the criteria of the category are understood, respected and effectuated. The progress/decadence understanding mitigated the diversity-of-style emphasis of much 19th century art history.







The authors of these three portraits, or at least the centuries and countries of their origin, will be recognizable to anyone familiar with painting, or historical dress and hair styles. Though all three are oil paintings on canvas, those who have studied painting more deeply will be aware of various technical differences among these painters. In such ways these paintings reflect their time. But from the standpoint of painting, as opposed to sociology and materials, they have important things in common: all are three-quarter, psychologically penetrating portraits of men, convincingly illusionistic and notable for free and deft handling. The painters—Titian, Velasquez and Manet—are more like one another than the historical emphasis on diversity would have us think.

Another countervailing factor is declarations by illustrious painters regarding their artistic debt. This is different from one style arising smoothly out of another; it is painters reaching out of their time and place to claim kinship with artists of different places and periods. The most famous example is the celebrated interest in Velásquez, a 17th century Spanish painter, of Manet, a 19th century French painter. Velásquez himself, instructed by Rubens to study Titian, a 16th century Italian painter, only "became himself", a painter distinguished from all the other Spanish painters of the time, once he did so.

Such links across time and space are unlike the influence of, say, Boucher on the young David, or the shift from Rococo to Neoclassicism, nor do they have anything to do with underlying social conditions; e.g. Rococo as product of the 'ancient regime' (the pre-revolutionary social order in France dominated by corrupt aristocrats) or Neoclassicism as an aspiration for democratic republicanism. Titian, Velásquez and Manet are socially, temporally and geographically distinct—though not so much that untrained eyes and the historically uninformed can easily see it. What links them in this chain of admiration is something that has everything and only to do with painting itself. This, too, mitigated 19th

century emphasis on stylistic diversity.

To resume: in the old view art is based on universal and eternal values while in the new view it is based on a three-fold doctrine:

- 1 The values of the present are related to place and time: they are local and ephemeral. As such they are unique and incommensurable with the values of the past.
- 2 Old values are superseded by new ones in such a way that the old values, and works based on them, are irrelevant and dead.
- 3 Values are perpetually emergent and radically differentiated such that the value of art is found only in newness and uniqueness.

This third point might seem to be contradicted by the various degrees of interest people give to pieces of new art, some instantly worth a fortune while most are ignored completely. But this is easily accounted for by a residue of social anxiety about art — with a capital 'A' — and the persistent attitude towards artistic genius and the prestige once conferred upon certain art for social and political reasons, to say nothing of the financial usefulness of small easily produced objects as repositories and conduits of wealth. If there is still impressive public talk about the importance of such and such an artist, or art work, by people who occupy the high ground in what is called the "art world", in private they will admit that it is all a sort of game where the counters are artists and art, and the stakes are money and prestige.

Pointing this out should not be seen as sly devaluation of the arguments defending the new emergent reality — no other situation could prevail given its premises and, after all, it is indeed a great game played among the great of this world which is a kind of proof of emergent reality theory. Nothing quite like it has ever been seen before. Things are going on in the name of "art" that would have been inconceivable a few centuries ago, exactly as emergent reality theory stipulates! I recognize that a new reality has indeed emerged, and that its values are unique to the present time. This situation determines most of what goes on in the name of art today.

Some might insist that this new reality is fake, that it is in fact a farrago of fad, fraud and fast talk, a mesmerizing blur of money and prestige. Others might object that I ignore how radically different modern and pre-modern life are from each other. To them I ask: are the constants of human life, all that is common to modern and premodern life, not passed over by modernist boosters in order not to weaken their arguments?

It may also be objected that my presentation of emergent reality doctrine is too radical, that the majority of its adherents, the majority of those who accept the New Art, do not reject the past as radically as I claim, or even reject it at all. It is certainly true that, since 1990, attitudes towards the past are not necessarily as extreme as they were in the previous three decades. My presentation, however, is an accurate description of the essence of the new doctrine, the particular nature of which, when it comes to practical, real world consequences, makes partial agreement effectively full agreement. Manzoni's canned excrement is certainly an amazing and profound phenomenon of some sort, but recognizing it as "art" is incompatible with understanding art in the old way. The dilemma is radical — when push comes to shove it is either one or the other.



'Biennale or Bust'
Aaron Kurzen, 1964? Kinetic-spinning-assemblage: brassiere, plastic, metal, silver paint, electric motor.

JUDGEMENT

We think in scientific terms. The land, the sea, the sky, houses and people are, most fundamentally, materials in interaction which present problems and have uses. People (human resources) can be thought of as virus carriers and polluters, problems which require solutions such as drugs and restrictions. It is also possible to think of people in a more poetical way, as owners of a soul, fellow travelers along this mortal coil. Art has not escaped the scientific tendency — witness aesthetics. Aesthetics is a field of study. The word is now used interchangeably with the word "art". The phrase "the science of art" is not common. We sense that art is not scientific. But we understand aesthetics as a sort of science.

Aesthetics have something to do with beauty. But what is beauty once it is only in the eye of the beholder? Not many people would say that everything is beautiful, but everything is certainly aesthetic. Ugliness itself is an aesthetic. Things which used to be universally considered disgusting and even horrific are now routinely considered aesthetically. Could it be any other way in a time when art itself can be anything? Film critics coolly discuss the aesthetics of scenes of gore. Industrial design, the colors and shapes of cars and coffee-makers, is contemplated from the same vantage as drawings by Tiepolo or sculptures by Maillol — aesthetically. Like mathematics and physics, aesthetics applies to everything.

Shifting the definitions of words or substituting one for another blurs perception and alters focus. 2023, the year of this writing, has seen a dramatic example in the word "woman", which has become impossible to define in polite company. Prior to this revolution it was permitted to discuss not merely the definition but the relative merits of things — men and women for example. In Ancient Greece, we are told, the male body was considered ideal, while for 19th century France it seems to have been the female. However frivolous, or worse, we may now regard such opinions, they were, at one time or another, the subject of uncontroversial public interest and debate.

But now the reality of anything, including testimony under oath, has become unhinged from a common morality or common experience. The problem is not that people sometimes lie, there is nothing exceptional about that. What we began to experience in art during the last century, we are now experiencing in every aspect of life. Just as art is whatever the artist says it is, so now anything is what anyone says it is. Timid disclaimers like "in my world" or "in my reality" preface what used to be called "statements of fact" by the rare public figures bold enough to make them. In this sense the multiverse has become effective. Any self-presentation, no matter how improbable or offensive to some, and the most blatant impossibilities — such as male pregnancy — must be considered legitimate. In such a situation how can we react and interact with any semblance of social decency, while remaining honest enough to retain self-respect?

Confronted with one of these realities in the multiverse, if we fail to like, and are reluctant to celebrate it, or fail to agree and are tempted to contest it, we must at least remain silent. If we see things another way, that is a personal matter. It is our truth, our reality. But should we not be free to see — and say — things our way, with as much right as others? As artists have been free, since the 1960s, to declare anything art, so reality itself, in all its aspects, is now subject to anyone's fiat. It is a general retreat into solipsism. As artists of the New Art have been presenting their productions to a mostly silent and apparently approving public, so a multiplying number of private worlds and singular realities are more and more frequently impinged upon public notice, a public sometimes constrained by law to adopt a stance, if not of appreciation, at least of uncomplaining acceptance.

There is an appearance of harmonious diversity in the multiverse. But there are backward people who cannot, or will not, celebrate diversity, and are sometimes tactless enough to allow that to be known. Such people are legitimate targets of social opprobrium, anger and denunciation. This would seem to violate the fundamental tenet of the multiverse, that each person's point of view, that anyone's opinion is legitimate. In fact the zeit-geist of the emergent reality arbitrates. Opinions based on social anxiety, on worn out attitudes, are like art of the past. Just as art of the past is made irrelevant by emergent reality, so it invalidates old truths; they are no longer supported, so to speak, by the emergent reality, as if reality were an updated operating system, and the past a vintage video game. Things once universally considered irrational and wrong can be correct in the emergent reality. Diversity is tolerable, on condition a thing is not obsolete. Obsolescence is non-being, and non-being makes no sense.

What some people call Truth can be condemned as a nasty falsehood imposed on everyone in the benighted past by an illegitimate authority. Such authority is illegitimate not only because it is not supported by the emergent reality but because no authority is legitimate. This is because serially emergent reality, or evolutionary reality — however we are to conceive of it — defines authority, at best, as a function of a given moment, and therefore without universal and permanent relevance. And since no particular moment is superior to any other — if we abstract from that sort of relevance peculiar to the present moment — there is no authoritative truth. But the multiverse itself is the foundation of diversity and common to each reality it supports. In other words, the idea that there is no authoritative truth is itself an authoritative truth. This is a logical dilemma to which the present thinking allows no solution.

Whether or not this paradox can or should be resolved, there is nothing unusual in how even quite unusual attitudes and ideas, so freely able to emerge in our allegedly anti-authoritarian atmosphere, can easily become popular and even obligatory, for social anxiety has always driven people to want to be affirmed in their ideal self-image or to see their political and religious beliefs affirmed. Whole nations have succumbed to extravagant delusions.

In our case it is not a particular fad, but subjectivity itself, which has achieved unprecedented generalization. The social anxiety thus generated demands recognition and even celebration of a myriad of quickly emerging ideas and attitudes. This is not fundamentally surprising. As Abraham Lincoln informs us in the first two points of his most famous utterance: "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time...". Nonetheless, I think we are confronted with a new phenomenon. I call it "contemporary-artization", and it now infects all aspects of society.

It seems unlikely that the current state of things can long endure, but the desire to order the world to our taste with a mere word is a permanent one, and the epidemic of word re-purposing which flared up so violently in 2023 was begun in the arts many decades previously. The consequences of re-purposing the word "art" are trivial compared to changing the meaning of a word like "woman". Art neither holds up bridges nor, contrary to certain beliefs, is it crucial to social stability. But the collapse of the meaning of many common words certainly is.

For words to be changed there has first to be a change of orientation. As in art, so in the contemporary-artization of everything: the change is from a poetic to a scientific orientation. In the case of art, the new outlook aesthetisized everything. When everything is only a configuration of the same underlying dross, when nothing has any inherent qualities — no soul, beauty, goodness or evil — there is no inherent difference between one thing and another. Any configuration, including those epiphenomena known as intelligence and morality, is only a particular shape, a structure like any other, a chemical consequence of reactions among structures. The difference between falling in love and a rock, is like the difference between a triangle and a rhombus—aesthetically and morally neutral. Each shape may have its own aesthetic quality, someone may prefer one to another, but it is impossible to argue one is somehow better. Everything has an equal claim to beauty which nullifies that quality as a term of distinction, and by the same token terminates its existence.

There used to be a term which has not been heard in public for decades: minor arts. Minor, lesser or secondary arts were such things as furniture making, weaving and typography. I have personally, and with the greatest pleasure and satisfaction, practiced these arts and have no reason or inclination to denigrate them. Now, with any suggestion of hierarchy forbidden, we may wonder what once justified the rankings that used to order so many areas of life? Why place one thing higher than another? What is gained, it may be asked, except the self satisfaction of some at the expense of others? All things are ennobled by honest work, from digging a ditch to building a cathedral. For the sake of a nail the battle was lost, goes the aphorism, and it is true. Important historical events can turn on the obscure action of an unknown hero who, surging out of anonymity, plays his crucial part and then disappears back into the undifferentiated mob. Man is a social animal. We all need and rely on each other, every person and their work deserves respect.

For example, we can admire the bandit who, with craft and calculation, patience and deft gesture, surges from his hiding place to buffet an elderly woman to the ground, removing her jewelry with quick efficiency and makes off, the police none the wiser, having contributed to a more equitable distribution of wealth.

We can admire the bandit's art, but should we? Typography is a victimeless art and yet, to speak of myself, I was persecuted for practicing it, slandered with merciless persistence for malfeasance, arrogance, incompetence and bad taste.* Because no good deed goes unpunished, such experiences are fairly common, but the banishment of any mention of hierarchy from polite society will not obliterate it. If we have indeed escaped moral distinctions, the self-satisfaction of those who know what not to say and when not to say it is certainly still with us. If words, of which magic is made, can twist and distort reality, ultimately it is reality that is elastic and words that are plastic.

Sensible people know that the painter and the framer practice arts of different ranks, but the maker of a very large frame of precious wood carved in graceful floral arabesques, polychromed and gilt, might well be the author of a greater work of art than some Sunday painter who tosses off a botched daub. Yet this careless and worthless painter can congratulate himself for practicing a high and noble art, where the frame maker might resent the low prestige accorded his line of work. This presents a problem we can no longer resolve except by according every art, from prophecy to lollipop licking, equal status.

What of our skillful bandit? His art, to be frank, is evil. A distinction has to be made among the arts more fundamental than high and low: that between good and evil. Take cooking, which has been celebrated as an art for centuries; what are we to say of the chef whose dishes are so tasty and copious that he causes obesity? Any art may be either good or evil, or both simultaneously in whatever degree. What used to be called minor arts, typography and so on, are evidently good when they serve society well, for example the armorer who makes quality guns. Fonts can be used to print bibles as well as libelous diatribes against honest men.

The question of distinction among the arts was never simple. Painting itself, perhaps the most prestigious of all the so-called fine arts, has been turned to bad account on endless occasions. One of the charms of painting is how it may be practiced by anyone, including those without training, often with acceptable results. But no art is so badly practiced on such a wide scale. Anyone can spread paint on a canvas and gratify themselves that, practicing the same art as Rembrandt and Van Gogh, they are part

^{*} The story of my typographical adventures are only obliquely relevant here. In 2000, as Editor-in-chief of the Vance Integral Edition, I felt, after investigation, that none of the then available fonts were satisfactory, and determined to make one myself. After a few months I produced 'Amiante' which was used for the edition. Though for years I was pilloried for this 'failier' and my presumptuousness, I continued to design fonts and study typography with enthusiasm and pleasure. This book is printed in a font of my design.

of a fraternity whose glory casts a glamour upon themselves. Skillful painters can concoct scenes of degradation and vileness to satisfy the most perverse tastes. Given that pretension and pandering are human constants, what was the basis for the old distinction between fine and minor arts?

Today everyone knows that anyone's pleasure is beyond criticism. It is no longer possible to challenge another person's tastes. Though objection to pedophilia persists, the triumph of subjectivity has progressed so far that public defense of such less and less reprehensible proclivities occurs and is acceptable in 'cultural' centers like Paris.

There used to be a common standard of pleasure which is still easy to understand: an evening with friends graced with good food, drink and conversation. If there is also music and other entertainments, satisfaction reaches a climax not unrelated to the pleasures of love and triumph, which banquets are often organized to celebrate. Such innocent enjoyments, along with the contemplation of beauty and study of good things (eudaimonia), used to be understood as leisure. Solipsistic frivolities were not so regarded. Leisure was not something that might be frowned upon. It was the flower of existence, what we did for its own sake, if we were lucky enough to have the time to do it. In antiquity leisure was understood as the business of the Muses, the nine daughters of Memory, charged with entertaining gods and heroes at their banquets in the palaces of Mount Olympus and the gardens of the Elysian fields. These are images of bliss, of what we do by choice, not necessity. The ideal of liking your job is a faint echo of this antique vision — faint because anything involving constraint is not leisure. What makes us happy is what we like, and what we like is what we would choose. The freedom to choose and to do what we like is everyone's dream.

Some people like and choose drugs, and finish dead under a bridge. So, in itself, choosing is not a good. There can be good and evil in what we like as much as in art. For leisure to be a true pleasure we must like what is good when we choose. Our impulses, as much as our bodies and minds, need training, and all training implies a distinction between trained and untrained, formed and unformed. Training in computer programing suits the trainee for a certain sort of work: sitting for hours everyday in a cubicle solving little problems of logic; a situation crippling to body and

mind, a deforming torture rack to the spirit. If the training is so successful that the trainee adapts well to this condition, we might be grateful he has grown unaware of where his spirit dreams, or should dream, to live — on the Elysian fields, seeing and hearing the divine Muses.

Malicious fools, who feed on the humiliation they can inflict on others, will always be with us. No organization, however egalitarian and homogeneous, will ever do away with them. But it is also true that benevolent and sensible people have always respected their fellows both for their good deeds and themselves, however modest.

The preceding seems a necessary introduction to what was once a self-evident distinction. But almost any statement on the subject now seems to call for endless and even impossible ground work. Boldly stated then, the fine arts, the high arts, were those related to leisure, to what is choiceworthy, desirable for its own sake, pleasures of our freedom—not whims and obsessions—unrelated to necessity and constraint. Thus music and dance. We don't need them, we just want them for sheer joy. There are also arts which are high because they elevate the necessary



towards the realm of choice: gastronomy as distinct from mere cookery, high fashion as distinct from mere clothing. Other arts cannot be raised above necessity: plumbing, ditch digging, or the art of execution, unless the latter is considered a sort of macabre theater. They are ennobled, in a way, by their necessity... and their practitioners, by practicing their arts well, can at least respect themselves if others will not.

The scale, from necessary to chosen-for-its-own-sake, is only where we begin to explore this matter, for there are good and bad choices, as well as choices of different ranks. There is nothing noble, but neither is there is anything reprehensible, about the arts of sun-bathing and bottle cap collecting. No blame attaches to their practice but neither do they compel admiration.

Why should painting be considered a higher art than, say, vehicle design? There are wonderfully beautiful and exciting cars, and different kinds of vehicles can be admired in different ways. For example, the American 4 ton 6x6 truck of World War II, is a thing that forces my own admiration. So many were produced, and they played such a prominent role in the amazing story of that war's logistics which, for reasons obscure, fascinate me... perhaps it is curiosity about the inner or unseen workings of things. Additionally they are handsome objects, at least in my eyes. So if I consider vehicle design, or industrial design generally, a lesser art than painting, it is not because I feel any lack of enthusiastic interest in the 4 ton 6x6, or fail to perceive its beauties, or suffer from insensitivity to its historic role. By the same token there is a great deal of painting I find uninteresting. So it is not because a thing is a painting that it is interesting to the artistic sensibility, and not because it is a truck that it is not.

Given the 4 ton 6x6, a piece of industrial design that excites and interests me and, say, the sort of 19th century journeyman painting generally found in most provincial churches in France, which does not, I still say that painting is a higher art than industrial design because what is in question is the art as such, not particular samples of it.

The difference between industrial design and painting is akin to the difference between necessary work and leisure. The designer of the truck does not begin with a blank canvas upon which every stroke of his brush, each color used, is a choice, a creative act of potential expression. A truck is not made for itself. Its purpose conditions most of its features. The industrial designers exhibit creative imagination in the narrow range of forms conceived appropriately to the truck's purpose. It is possible to be artistically sensitive in and to these choices. We may admire the vigorously spartan practicality, the high arches of the fenders, the upright rectangularity of the windshield, and so on. These features bespeak the clever speed with which the truck was designed, the great

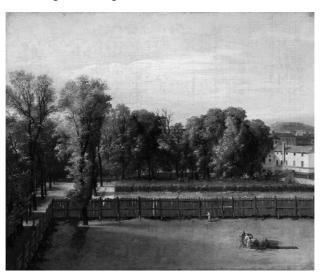
machines in huge factories that churned out so many of them. It may be my own perfervid imagination, but the lines of that truck suggest to me the men and women who contributed to the war effort in those factories; their hopes and dreams seem to flicker like teeming ghosts in those mighty forms and their gruff assembly.

Likewise, in some damp chapel, confronted with a third-rate Crucifixion — clumsy drawing, routine coloring, uninspired handling — I imagine the labor to fill a once constant demand for religious decoration, and the committees which ordered and paid for such work. Looking at them, I wonder about the dreams of those painters, some of whom perhaps went on, like Renoir, to become masters.

As for the cars of today, they all look the same. I know something of the bureaucratic norms and commercial doctrines responsible for the bulbous front ends, the small windows and plethora of features rendering them heavy, over-complicated, uniform and dark, like a plague of overgrown insects or larvae. They express a world of corporate head-quarters—isolated glass boxes sheltering stalls in vast laboratory-like spaces—each with its rows of figures hunched over a screen, controlling a robot in some far away place assembling already assembled parts, managing sales and loans in some far country, constructing charts, attending meetings, being on call, responding to e-mails, taking breaks at specific intervals, vacations to certain places, calculating health and retirement benefits...

The little landscape by David (opposite) however, the one he did from his prison window, opens a marvellous world. Our imagination may be fired, but well before we perceive the ghosts of blood crazed revolutionaries bent on murder which flutter behind the shimmering leaves, in that astonishingly simple sky, white above the trees, or in the light streaming quietly across the ground and peeking through the fence, David tells us so much of himself and his world, that this one painting might stand for all painting, even for all mankind, all folly and all joy. This painter, whose circumstances and enthusiasm entangled him in one of the most famously terrible events of all time, even seems to tell us something ultimate, give us something like a message from God. That message is not just the forms and light, the space and colors, but each touch of the brush. The painting mysteriously becomes infinite, like a portal into all time and everywhere.

The difference between the lesser arts and the fine arts is the scope they allow to human expression. That they offer such scope is one thing; that it is taken advantage of is another. How it is taken advantage of is yet another. There is a bitter sweet quality to David's painting. He might have been in danger of the guillotine, in which case this picture, though



not his last (he escaped his danger) is a sort of testament, expressing all he felt at such a time. It is not necessary to know he was imprisoned; the painting is so redolent of a portentous atmosphere of frustrated yearning, joyful yet doubtful, that knowing the circumstances of its making only confirms our impression of a human cry, despite its impressively modest quality.

The designers and laborers who fabricated the hundreds of thousands of 4 ton 6x6s of World War II are no less human than David—their joys and trials no less meaningful, no less intense, their contribution no less respectable. Other such designers and workers produced V2s, 500 pound bombs and other machineries of war. Some built or supervised the building of shelters for prisoners. Each of us may supply, and judge, our own examples of the many ways man's ingenuity and labor has been used, and to what ends. Perhaps, from a high and mysterious perspective, each of those things, to say nothing of the pots and rags of common do-

mestic use, or the multitude of third rate painting, is somehow necessary, beautiful and good. Perhaps we can reach for such a perspective, try to imagine what seeing everything, the beneficent and marvellous as well as the shoddy and evil, as in some way equally part of something mysteriously divine. But from a human perspective, the perspective to which we are condemned, judgements cannot be eluded because things weigh too heavily on our mortal selves.

The 4 ton 6x6 is connected to a great historical event, and the designers of those trucks had a vital and urgent job to accomplish. They were obliged to conceive of forms but lacked the leisure to consider themselves artists or, if they did, the problems they were solving left little room for art. But much industrial design is self-consciously artistic. In the 1930s the Art Deco style and the aesthetic doctrines of the Bauhaus were applied to furniture and buildings. This style and doctrine were self-consciously related to movements from painting: Cubism and Suprematism. Pretty stories are told about this, how the spirit of the time is being expressed and so on, and the people involved were certainly having such thoughts. But, practically speaking, these forms are adapted to machine processes because of their simplicity and geometric qualities, just as curling Rococo forms are adapted to wood carving which enjoyed a similar vogue in the 18th century; this curling and curving style, whatever its artistic merits, is so appropriate to wood carving that chairs in this style continue to be made into the 21st century (left: industrial processes, as here, are now capable of mimicking Rococo carving). Other modern-

ist styles and approaches, Symbolism, the Nabis, Fauvism, Surrealism, Expressionism or Socialist Realism offered no industrially useful set of shapes, but any relation to the prestige of painting was a commercial argument — though the pretty stories the designers were telling themselves

loomed large in their minds. Industry often does without design but many consequences of industrial production, abandoned factories for example, enjoy an aesthetic vogue today.

With the introduction of moulded plastics and other technologies, freer forms were commercially viable, and design now offers a dizzying procession of shapes and colors imposed on vehicles, furniture and appliances, to say nothing of tools, protective gear and containers, all reeking of artistic intent. The fantastical imaginings of industrial designers have lavished themselves on such things as toasters and coffee makers to such an extent that any museum of industrial design could only hope to suggest the range of their creativity.

When ashtrays and spittoons were in common use they often served in high toned places where elegant forms rendered more tolerable their lowly and even unsanitary functions. The cars and radios of the 1930s were notable objects even without an aesthetics layer, but as centers of family activity they were worthy of memorable form. Design is now lavished not only on kitchen appliances, which at least grace a more or



less public area, but even such utilitarian ephemera as toothbrushes and dust pans now come in all shapes and colors.

This frenetic mass aestheticism is symptomatic of the place creativity has in the emergent reality. Even manufacturers of such things as fly-paper and crackers, create brands, not as simple signs of recognition like the crude symbols burned into the hides of steers, but tasked to carry a weight of association intended to make their consumption a matter of prestige and identity. In the same way, the pioneers of industrial design wanted to associate painting — and its prestige — with their manufacturing. Such relations between human beings and mass produced industrial products are an aspect of how aesthetics are ubiquitous in the emergent reality. Aesthetisized products and aesthetizised perceptions are a caricature of artistic activity and poetic sensibility.

This artization of all things, this aesthetization of all sensibilities, is

part of the contemporary-artization of everything. It arises from an existential need to transcend the old manner of being, where merely existing was already precious and important. Now, as a matter of self respect, it is necessary to create, or to generate reality itself. How? With a word: "God said, let there be..."

I am not overlooking the cynical greed which surely motivates some

production. The aesthetization of everything is not only a tactic to influence consumer fidelity and insure profits. Gratification of greed, and production itself, do not require aesthetization. Take the most utilitarian object imaginable, which its designers and manufacturers never dreamed of aesthetisizing—a 21st century artillery piece. Even its brutal hideousness has an aesthetic quality in the emergent reality, for brutal hideousness is an aesthetic quality. In the 17th century care was often taken to cover cannon barrels with decoration and prestigious symbols. This was a way for artisans to showcase their skill and for sovereigns to glorify their powers. Lavishing art upon all aspects of life was not aesthetization; it was something of grace and joy added to utility.

Where any 17th century cannon barrel is instantly recognized from a distance as what it is, the elements of grace which relieve its surface are only perceptible close at hand. With coffee makers it is exactly the opposite. Their forms are so diverse and abstracted from their function, that from a distance we perceive their aesthetic quality only. Only when inspecting them closely can we understand their function. The aesthetic attitude that renders modern weapons—those utterly and unapologetically efficient instruments of mass murder—in some way



beautiful, is a sort of divine consciousness, beyond good and evil, which can contemplate what for man must be the worst horrors, with a Buddha-like complaisance.

What is such contemplation of horror like? The experience has become banal, a scene in a film, a slow pan over the results of a bombardment: mangled and dismembered bodies. The color has been adjusted to give the blood a violet tinge and turn the flesh a sepia gray. As music casts its spell the director cuts to a distraught widow, long dark locks partly hiding her smooth young face. A tear dripping down her cheek falls on the partly exposed breast glimpsed though the garment she has rent in her anguish... fade back to the gun: powder smoke slowly swirls around its oddly jagged forms, like a sculpture by Eduardo Chillida or Anthony Caro—the music swells in mournful triumph, etc...

In other times military triumph was considered glorious, and fallen heroes were covered with honors. We can look down on old-fashioned attitudes as foolish and hypocritical, but how should we judge the aesthetization of horror at which no one sneers? Compare a painting of Louis XIV by Charles Le Brun (next page) with the opening scene of the Spielberg film which depicts a civil war battle. A certain Kevin M. Levin says this about it: "... Spielberg throws his viewer into the middle of a nameless close-quarter fight. [He] wanted [to show] the brutality and hatred that defines any bloody civil war... national identities... are indistinguishable... The mud functions as a metaphor for the ugliness of war [which has] perhaps... lost any sense of meaning for the two parties..."

The Le Brun painting also shows a confusion of struggling bodies, some trampled by horses. But Louis, aided by spiritual forces—as his enemy is aided by infernal ones—presides in tranquility over the scene, while a celestial being prepares to set the crown of triumph on his head.

If this painting neither wallows in sad sentimentality nor depicts broken flesh, it cannot be accused of avoiding how war inflicts death, while the infernal creatures which rove in the confusion are poetic suggestions of horror and gore. We might find this flattery of Louis ridiculous today, but nothing succeeds like success, and the adulation of winners, to say nothing of glee at the embarrassment, or worse, of our foes, is with us as much today as it ever may have been in the past.

If Le Brun does not descend to Spielberg's cynical and nihilistic depths



his range is larger. If he exalts victory to explain and justify it, he also points at its lowest aspects: pain and death. For Spielberg there is only meaningless horror.

Spielberg has depicted war in a more nuanced way. It is not that he can't aim higher, it is that his orientation, his desire, his thought, tends downwards. Le Brun's orientation is upwards. The difference between Le Brun's painting and Spielberg's film is not unrelated to the rank of the two arts. There are films—though few seem to have been made for half a century—which seek to glorify military heroism and sacrifice. But what are disintegrating spools of cellulose nitrate more than industrial detritus, once away from the electrically powered mechanisms and screens on which they depend? Compare one of Michelangelo's slaves

(below) which, were we to discover it lying neglected in a garbage dump, would still speak, to those with ears to hear, of human beauty and suffering.

It is not only that rock has a simple nobility which cellulose lacks, though there is something to be said for that. Rather it is how everything we see in a carved stone is the trace of an artistic gesture, the expression of a single thought. This does not make stone sculpture automatically good; there are poor artists whose thoughts are paltry. By the same token film's collective and industrial aspects do not wreck its possibility to reach poetic heights. And yet, even in the case of 'films d'auteurs', there



are so many contributors, each with their own ideas, so many technical aspects, so much dependence on a commercial and industrial complex, that no film can embody a single thought in the sense a painting always does.

The minor arts do not offer the same potential for poetic expression as the fine arts. The more non-artistic elements are involved, the more it is a matter of 'techne' and not poetry, the less room there is for the finer things, the things we value for themselves. An artillery piece does not need beauty to do what we need it to do, and we can live without gazing at sunsets. There are people crass enough to boast that beauty is a waste of that precious resource, time. Sensible people — scientific people — know what time is.

To dance we need nothing but that with which we were born. An aged dancer might merely rise to his toes and lift his arms with poetic intent—already it is art, pure poetry, and those with eyes to see might live a moment they can never forget.

FORM

The phrase "Art for Art's sake" was coined in the context now confusingly known as Modernism — during the emergence of Impressionism and so on. Modernism is understood as a rebellion against, or an evolution out of older things, a profound and historic change. Regarding painting, this view of Modernism is confused at best. But the association of painting and Modernism is a prominent and foundational block of emergent reality doctrine. This association is so well-hammered into our minds and hearts that to see the truth requires a change of orientation. The beginning of that change is a critical attitude towards the doxa of emergent reality. This is difficult because even if emergent reality doctrine is fundamentally false, it is not false in every way. Things do change with time. But are those changes more than fads and fashions?

We no longer wear stovepipe hats and bustles, and paintings by Picasso and Miro look very different from paintings by Rubens and Guardi. But do such differences justify the word "modern": something radically new, something other? Socialist-man was a modern thing that disappeared in the catastrophe of Communism, but Modernism in art remains triumphant as the incontrovertible demonstration of the vitality and reality of Modernity.

What is the relation between modern painting and the old kind of painting: is it like the evolutionary process which links homo sapien to the primordial sea-creature who first ventured onto dry land? If so, Modernist painting is not something radically other, because evolutionary theory pretends that homo sapien is fundamentally the same sort of thing as the primordial creature: an animal. But if humans are certainly animals in some respects, are they animals in all respects? Evolutionary enthusiasts think so. They understand the human in terms of the animal or, more generally, the higher in terms of the lower. Darwinism sparked a gleeful effort, which has had much success, to demote man from his biblical status as master, or at least steward of the world, to that of a large, particularly clever rat or bug. If this has elevated animals from their low rank, it has not raised them much, for if, as some claim, the power of speech is present in animals, that discovery has served less to promote animals to human status than the opposite. There are even

scientists who say that man has evolved into something outside nature. No longer a child of the world, the New Man is enemy to the world and himself. Evolution is catastrophic. It must be seized, controlled, and steered in a chosen direction before it is too late.

Unlike the New Man, the New Art is beneficial, better, higher, deeper or more essential than the old art. The evolution of the New Art out of the old art, if it is an evolution, is positive. The New Art is the apotheosis of the old art. It is liberated. It is now for its own sake. The categories, arbitrary standards, and class based uses of the old art were restrictive. The New Art is a boundless and pathless zone of human creativity — exactly what the evolutionary process for humanity will become once liberated from nature and subjected to human direction. Natural man must become artificial, but art has escaped artificiality and become natural.

What used to be called "human nature" was not our choice. It was what we were given to be. Nature imposed itself. It alienated us from ourselves. To be what we choose to be by the mere act of choosing is god-like freedom. Alienation from self, imposed by nature, is overcome thanks to literal "self-realization". The New Art generates objects and events which correspond to a certain reality, that of a particular artist. Art is for the sake of personal expression. The old idea was that only a tyrant had unlimited freedom, and only by intimidation and force could oblige others to accept and celebrate his choices. Today's multiverse of mutualized pan-legitimacy, which welcomes and celebrates everyone's choices, allows simultaneous self-realized freedom for all.

If the multiverse resolves alienation from self, it exacerbates alienation from society. Were we to live in communion with each other, sharing the same ideas, willingly filling our place in a society of justice and equality, our thoughts and acts would be determined outside ourselves. We could have no personal ideas or choose work fulfilling to us personally. We would be alienated from ourselves. The emergent reality liberates the individual, arranging harmonious mutual existence in a multiverse where diversity is respected.

The old art was imposed by social convention, not given by nature. The New Art is natural because it corresponds to all liberated individuals equally, despite their diversity. It is art not by respecting some arbitrary norm but in being the unique product of each individual. Man, meanwhile, is escaping both the blindly mechanical determination of nature and the

conventional and oppressive determination of society; he can now decide, freely and individually, what he is. Art, on the other hand, has escaped human determination and become what it is by nature. No longer imprisoned in particular forms, standards and purposes by a class of social oppressors, it is now what it is by nature: a zone of freedom.

The New Art is liberating and egalitarian; everyone can be a creator because creativity is not a matter of elitist training but a flow from the inner self and/or emergent reality. The old art destroyed creativity by restricting its forms and imposing arbitrary standards. And yet the old art remains the principal commercial argument and prestige guarantee for the democratized supermarket of culture. Museums used to be temples: freely entered but frequented only by the devout. The plebe may not have visited or valued the museums but museums were open to them. With the New Art, temples of painting have been transformed into centers of global 'culture', bustling palaces of commerce, requiring reservations and expensive tickets. Bilbao, the most iconic example, is less like a temple and more like the Kaaba, more object of a hajj than depository of anything. One goes to Bilbao to say one has gone, to become a Haji, not to experience whatever the building holds. The museum itself is the principal artifact. Only globe-trotters can travel to Bilbao* and, when public safety is at stake, only collaborators.

There have always been unwashed masses and cultural elites. But the old art was for everyone. The operas of Verdi were the pop music of the 19th century, and the paintings of El Greco decorated churches attended by the whole city. Even if it is true that only the educated and sophisticated can fully appreciate El Greco, anyone can understand him sufficiently.

A single artifact is retained in the public mind from the 1960s: Warhol's silk-screen 'Marilyn'. The half century since then has been an artistic desert as far as the plebe is concerned. If Cubism and other aspects of Modernism touched the popular imagination before Warhol, nothing has since, unless film is promoted to the first rank which, as the Seventh Art, it has. But film is an industrial and collective art.† Wondrous as it may sometimes be, it is constrained by commercial exigencies which

^{*} Can those who yearn to make their Hajj to Bilbao but cannot, be compared to the humble mason, 'Jude the Obscure', and his yearning to attend Oxford, a mere day's journey away?

[†] Eric Rohmer, who made most of his films with a crew of two, is a notable counter example. If the medium, contrary to what is said, is not the message, each medium nonetheless imposes particular restraints. Dependence on industrial infrastructure is an aspect of any film-making.

restrict it to a lower rank. Something is better than nothing, but it is not clear that film, despite occasional masterpieces, can be said to have nourished society in the way it is pretended art is supposed to, or if what it has given, over all, has been salubrious.

How can the past be at once evil and stifling, yet guarantor for what, undraped in its mantle, would be of no interest or value to anyone? The New Art, flower of Modernism, child of rebellion against class discrimination and creative asphyxiation, is yet heir to the greatest reservoir of prestige known to modernity. For what are Alexander, Ceasar and Napoleon compared to Leonardo, Beethoven and Van Gogh? Megalomaniac mass murderers are mere crooks. Artists bring meaning and depth to humanity.

The myth of Modernism in painting may be resumed like this: a few heroically revolutionary painters, practicing Romanticism, Impressionism, Cubism and other isms, struggled against a conservative academy which did its best to suppress them. Their victory opened the 20th century to abstraction which, in the 1960s, blossoms into Contemporary Art, the first sign of which is Pop art. This narrative, which can, and frequently is, stretched out to book length, is not distorted because it is too simplistic; no matter how much it is elaborated, it remains misleading because it is false.

The academy was established in France in the 17th century to insure the flourishing of French painting. Art, and painting in particular, remained a source of happiness and national prestige until well after the invention of film and telecommunications — witness how, after World War II, Abstract Expressionism was touted as a proof of American cultural vitality. But in our time, when painting as a sign of dynastic or national dynamism no longer exists, it is hard to appreciate its importance in the 17th and 18th centuries. The academy promoted good work and trained new painters. It sent the best student each year to Rome where their education was supervised with progress reports made to the Paris authorities. The city of Rome was a school of painting in itself, where young French painters might copy the masterpieces of Raphael and Michelangelo and profit from contemporary Italian painting, then still preeminent. France eventually became the artistic center of the world, and other countries founded academies on the French model.

Despite difficulties of travel — as often as not winners of the 'prix

de Rome' had to get there on foot—there was an international artistic community. French painters like Poussin and Ingres lived in Rome, and Italian composers like Rossini lived in Paris.* Professional European painters numbered only in the hundreds and since art education and work was concentrated in certain cities, they inevitably crossed paths. Prior to Modernism's struggle against Academicism there were different currents in painting. In the 17th century there was rivalry between the Roman school, exemplified by the Carracci, and the Neapolitan school, exemplified by Caravaggio and the Tenebresques. Poussin was an exponent of the former and said of Caravaggio that he "was born to destroy painting". But Roman and Tenebresque painting - also called "Caravaggism" — were not fundamentally incompatible. A French painter of the early 18th century, Pierre Subleyras, mixed them. The academy's role in such controversies was as forum at most. It concentrated on education and bringing quality work to prominence. In the 18th century its openmindedness was remarkable.

There was a hierarchy of genres: most prestigious was so-called history painting (large paintings with many figures), next came portraiture, then landscape, still life, and genre painting (scenes of ordinary life). Artists were admitted to the academy under these rubrics and rankings. In the early years of the 18th century, Charles Le Fosse, then head of the academy, discovered an obscure young painter eking out a journeyman's living doing genre scenes and decorative arabesques in the shops of artisans. Le Fosse recognized his remarkable talent and how his personal work fit none of the established categories. To welcome him into the academy a new category was eagerly created: 'fêtes galantes'. This painter is now one of the most famous in history while Le Fosse and the academicians who promoted him are forgotten. Human institutions being what they are, I do not doubt that episodes of jealous exclusion occurred even in the 18th century, but the French academy should be recognized as the artistically positive and humane institution it generally was.

As the French revolution drew near, however, a new factor arose, a non-artistic factor only indirectly related to painting. For reasons of circumstance this factor became entangled with emerging Neoclassisism. The first notable incident provoked by this entanglement, the first shudder of what was to develop into a battle for the soul of painting in the 19th century, occurred in 1771. The last mistress of Louis XV, Jeanne

^{*} To say nothing of a famous German composer who wrote Italian music in England, or another, even more famous, who wrote French music in Germany.





Bécu, 'comtesse du Barry', commissioned Fragonard to paint a set of panels depicting 'The Pursuit of Love'. Once they were done, however, she rejected them, and asked a Neoclassic, Vien, to decorate her colonnaded pavilion instead.

The spirit of the Enlightenment had caught the imagination of the reading public, then exclusively the French upper classes. If by 1789 Enlightenment ideas had filtered down to the peasantry, in 1771 only aristocrats and churchmen were dreaming of universal brotherhood and political equality, and these ideas were becoming entangled with art. The old kind of painting, Fragonard's, became associated with the benighted past—the 'ancien regime', social inequality and the irresponsible frivolity of the court. Neoclassicism was sober and high-minded. It suited the mood of the day.

The Paintings of Fragonard and Vien (above) both show a theatrical scene with a good deal of drapery under vaporous trees and sky; there may seem little to choose between them. But in 1771 Vien was the stylish choice, the right-thinking choice. Not right enough, however, to save pour Jeanne from the guillotine twenty-two years later.

Vien's student, David, became a revolutionary, the foremost Neoclassic,

and director of the academy. Fragonard fell out of fashion and lost his fortune in the torment of the revolution. But David made him a well-salaried curator of the Louvre museum, then being established.*

It is cynically erroneous to condemn an institution as a retrograde and reactionary impediment to the promotion of new talent and new ways when its directors, often unquestionably the best painters of the day, could conduct themselves with the open-mindedness of a Le Fosse and the non-partisan generosity of a David.

The academy's bad reputation is largely due to the legend of the 'salon des refusés'. It was not a joyous free-for-all under a tent, with grubby, beret-wearing painters protesting suppression of Impressionism. Radical egalitarianism in painting had been tried in 1848—the jury had been dropped, but so much bad work invaded the salon it had been intolerable, and a jury was reestablished. Here is what actually happened. In 1863 over a thousand painters were excluded from the official salon. Renoir, making his first submission, was not among them. His painting, 'Esmeralda Dancing with a Goat', in the 'style noir' then in vogue, was accepted by the juror Cabanel (1823), celebrated exponent of the academic Pompier style. Only two among those refused were later to be called Impressionists: Manet and Pissarro. What then occurred was remarkably liberal. 5000 paintings had been submitted that year, of which only 1200 had been accepted for the salon, mostly for reasons of space. So a 'salon des refusés' was ordained by Napoléon III himself, to be organized and judged by another celebrated academician, Bonnat (1833), in the Louvre, and 871 of the rejected painters were able to show their work.

The numbers involved give us an idea of the miniscule percentage represented by that handful of "modernists" who are, for us, the story of 19th century French painting. That bright legend is not a problem because it blinds us to other worthy painters, but because it obscures what was really going on.

The painters from each generation whose celebrity has reached us today can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Those born in the last years of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century are Gericault (1791) Corot (1796, opposite above) Delacroix (1798) and Daumier (1808, opposite below). There are, of course, a few other well known painters of this period, including some whose modernist credentials are less sure, notably Ingres (1780). Others who had very great importance at the

^{*} David said of this, "Fragonard can dedicate his old age to the care of masterpieces of which, in his youth, he augmented the number."



time, such as Jules Dupré (1811) and Couture (1815) are rarely to be found in museums. Meanwhile the froth of labels — Naturalism, Realism Symbolism, etc. — meant to make order of the welter of 19th century ferment, only obscures the realities. They are pigeon holes into which few painters actually fit, or

only for a certain time, and most, like Impressionism, were given after the fact. That particular term was initially an insult, and yet much ink has been wasted explaining and justifying it, talk which then influenced painters, prompting Renoir to remark that "literature is the enemy of painting."

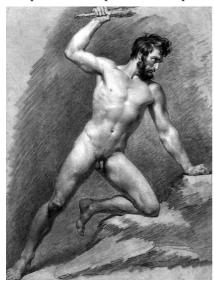
To understand the 19th century it is nonetheless helpful to indicate the triumph of Neoclassicism. Its most celebrated exponents — Picot, Robert-Fleury, Cogniet, Scheffer, etc. — may be known to students of art history

but the work of hundreds of others moulder in cathedrals, churches and old houses across France. As for our modernists, apart from vague and misleading references to a supposed rebellion against the academy and tradition, the actual context and events of the time are obscured and falsified. Our notions about what modernists were doing that set them apart, and why they were doing it, are wrong.

Neoclassicism was a Trojan horse. It carried with it, not enlightenment ideas as such, but a certain consequence of them, the practical effect of which was to



push painting towards illusion. I don't say realism, because that term has a nitty-gritty connotation of social issues, apropos in the case of artists like Courbet (1819) and Zola. The early modernists called paintings which emphasized illusion "illustrative". But these early modernists neither called themselves "modernists" nor were they so-called by anyone else—at least not then. If Enlightenment ideas and the French Revolution were affecting society, if socialism and soon Marxism was in the air, painting had not yet, as later it did, become directly entangled. At that point, with Neoclassicism, there was only an exaggerated enthusiasm for illusion, for tromp-l'œil. It compelled certain painters to analyze painting anew.





Corot (1798, page 47 above) and Daumier (1808, page 47 below) almost alone in their indifference to Neoclassical norms, nonetheless became important figures. Their work, in its "abstract" quality — I will discuss this term later — already contains everything that Modernism, Post-Impressionism in particular, became. Neoclassicism's pseudo Greco-Roman decor, faux nobility and labored illusions are artificial and finicky by contrast. Gericault (1791) and Delacroix (1798) are something else. Their thunderous history painting, which include and surpass the canons of Neoclassicism, strike through the mass of its productions like angry horses scattering a flock of sheep. Their rich textures and atmospheres are a rude and gratify-

ing contrast to Neoclassicism's glassy surfaces and cloying sentimentality.

Called "modern" and labeled a "Romantic", Delacroix indignantly announced himself a classic. He saw himself not as an innovator but an exponent of Tradition. Neoclassical painting was about story-telling and fooling eyes, more than 16th century painters like Bellini, Veronese and Durer, and certainly more than Delacroix's beloved Constable who, like Corot, approached painting originally, properly speaking — observation of nature and attention to methods and materials. Neoclassicism begins with the Greco-Roman mood it wants to project, the story it wants to tell. The problem this creates for painting, mutatis mutandis, applies as much to any approach predicated on what painting might express, and not



its fundamentals. Faced with the turgid Greco-Roman and tromp-l'œil obsessions engulfing painting, the early modernists, were driven to remember that painting is more than effects of light and texture, more than exact rendering. It has form as well as content, and the poetry of painting is in its form — how, and the spirit in which, it is done. Men like Corot, Daumier. Delacroix and Manet, needed no theorizing to know their business through the fog of the New Art's doctrines. But others did, and I will give an account of their ideas. All these so-called modernists were so far from being innovators that it is not unfair, in the context of their time, to label them "reactionary".

The innovation, the new painting, the modern fad was the fussy illusionism dressed up in togas, which was transforming painting into a desiccated process of optical transcription. The so called modernists turned their backs on this. They clove to the essence of painting as they had learned to love it in Rome and Venice, and as it came to them naturally.

Tintoretto (this page) is earthy and expressive. His lines are beautiful in themselves. It is not as realistic as the Poynter (1836)—an English Neoclassic, president of the royal academy (opposite, left)—and even less so than this sample of Classical Realism (opposite, right) late 20th

century academic revivalism which regards itself as traditional for going back to the innovation of 19th century illusionism while leaving out its only arguably traditional aspect: Neoclassicism itself.*

The next generation included Puvis de Chavanne (1824) and Manet (1832). The notable places these men have in the history of modernism has become particularly obscured — both were reactionary rebels. Puvis, whose celebrity as a so-called modernist survived into the 1950s, rejected Neoclassicism by returning to its 17th century godfather, ultimate source of early modernist theory. That godfather, Poussin, proposed a pithy definition: "Painting is pictures of everything under the sun, made with lines and colors on a flat surface, and its purpose is delectation". This statement is more profound than it may seem.

The purpose of painting is not to teach morals, not to affect the zeit-geist, not to influence politics. Like the concerts of the Muses at the banquets of the gods it is to be enjoyed for itself. Maybe it can be made with intent to influence, and it might even succeed after a fashion. It has certainly stimulated tourism to Italy since the 15th century, and to France since the 18th. But if tourism was stimulated it was not because painters worked to that end, as advertising illustrators might, but because people eager to enjoy painting flock to where they can do so.

Using painting for non-artistic goals is like eating soup with a fork: you can do it after a fashion, but that is not what a fork is for. Inevitably you end up deforming it, pounding the tines together to make something more like a spoon, because a spoon is what you really want. Both spoons and forks are eating utensils, as both advertising illustration and paintings are pictures. But there are important differences between forks and spoons as there are important differences between artistic painting and the many kinds of image-making that go on for a variety of reasons.

Poussin explains that painting is "pictures of everything under the sun...". Painting is about what we see. One might say it is about seeing itself, but this is qualified, for as Poussin goes on, it is "... made with lines and colors on a flat surface." In other words, just as poetry is not made of sentiments or ideas but of words expressive of sentiments and ideas, so painting is made neither of seeing nor of what we see, but of lines and colors expressive of those things. Like poetry it is language. Language expresses a thing, it is not that thing.

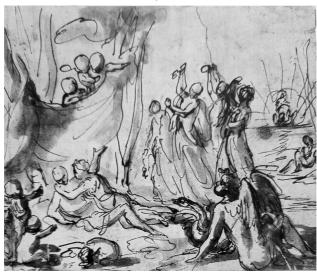
Illusion is one of the charms of painting. The Greeks spoke of mimesis.

^{*} Neoclassicism, in itself, is large format Greco-Roman history painting with idealized figures and elevated, patriotic sentiment.



Pliny recounts how Zeuxis painted grapes so apparently real that birds flew down to peck at them. But Simonides called painting "silent poetry". Just as a poem is no scientifically exact reproduction of a reaction or a state, but an evocation in words which have their own kind of music, so painting is an evocation of what we might see, with lines and colors which have their own kind of music.

Here are two drawings to show Poussin's sensitivity to color (or areas of value) on one hand, and lines on the other, as beautiful things in themselves. How different both are from the academic and Classical Realist drawings on page 48 which hardly qualify as poetry, and as illustrations are, respectively, ridiculous and hideous. Obsessed with representation, anatomy and illusion, they ignore the essential. The French have a name for such work: 'étude documentaire'. 'Etude documentaire' is a minor art. Poussin's work has the same charm and beauty as Tintoretto's. It is not that Tintoretto and Poussin did not know anatomy — obviously they did — but they kept it in its place, they knew what to do with it. It is not of the essence. The essence is poetry.



Puvis rebelled against Neoclassicism by going back to Poussin who emphasized beautiful areas of color spread across the canvas rather than elaborate illusions which obscure the beauty of the form. He rebelled against the tonal, or values based, approach used for the effects of light sought by Neoclassics like Picot (see page 167). In the 17th century Poussin had already objected to the Tenebresques for this reason.

From Puvis, or his circle, came the early modernist theory that painting has a decorative and an illustrative aspect.* The decorative aspect is Poussin's "lines and colors on a flat surface". This is the form — painting as a language of lines and colors. The illustrative aspect is whatever we see "under the sun", what we illustrate, or shed light upon. Consciousness of the decorative aspect helped these early so-called Modernists avoid over-emphasis on illusion.

Though famously a dandy, and no theorist, Manet also rejected the fashionable ideas of Neoclassicism and returned, like Puvis, to a painter of the 17th century: Velásquez. Manet's admiration for Velásquez was so great that it inspired much of his work. Manet's most famous painting, 'Le déjeuner sur l'herb', is a pastiche of certain 16th century Venetian and Roman paintings. If, like Renior (1841) and others, Manet experimented with certain notions of Impressionism, it was not the essence of his work.

As for Renoir, his attitude towards so-called Modernism is clear: like Delacroix he considered himself a traditionalist. Ambroise Vollard preserved Renoir's opinions, among which are, "Painting is learned in museums." "Looking at the work of the Old Masters banishes any idea of thinking too well of ourselves." "Sure, everyone's a genius these days, but we don't know how to draw a hand, we don't know anything about how to paint." Renoir rejected scientific theories of painting, and regarded mechanical reproduction as destructive not only of art but the joy of life. Of Impressionism he said, "We just wanted to use bright colors, like the old masters." He quipped that Impressionism was invented when they ran out of black and used blue instead. Like Tintoretto, he called black the most beautiful color, though it became a principle of Impressionism to banish that "non-color". Were any of this taken seriously the legend of modernism in painting would collapse.

Ingres, David's greatest student, condemned as a conservative but also celebrated as a modernist, has a unique place in 19th century painting. Writing in the early 20th century, the Post-Impressionist Jacques-Emile

^{*} These terms were still used in the 1970s by painters of the generation 1920-30.



Blanche (1861) in his 'Propos d'un Peintre', wrote that Ingres "incarnated all the particularities of a modern master, at once independent and original, and profoundly, narrowly and piously traditional." By "modern" Blanche does not here mean a progressive or evolutionary otherness, beyond what any artist inevitably has of originality, but simply "contemporary". Student of Manet, Blanche knew all the painters, writers and composers of his day, both English and French, and painted portraits of all of them. What are we to make of Blanche's "profound and pious traditionalism" of modern masters?

Ingres was considered the cham-

pion of Neoclassicism, against Romanticism as supposedly incarnated by Delacroix, in a silly war of styles concocted by critics. These labels confuse the issue, as did the terms 'colore' and 'disegno' in the controversy between advocates of Titian and Michelangelo. If, in its extreme polish and resolution, the work of Ingres is the apotheosis of the careful and dry manner of David, it has aspects which distinguish it from the rest of 19th century Neoclassicism, notably its abstract treatment of forms.

For the master draftsman Ingres, anatomy had no secrets. If there are distortions, they are intentional. In the context of Neoclassicism's flat-footed and questionable devotion to "truth of nature" — which began to be optical exactitude — Ingres' distortions have a unique flavor. They are coolly deliberate and apparent in a way that can be shocking, yet they are one of the most traditional aspects of his painting. In his 'Thetis Imploring Jupiter' (above) anatomical impossibilities stand out clearly in the context of the highly finished and realized figures. Neoclassical high-polish calls attention to them in a way previous manners of painting never did, even when the distortions are more extreme.

A few examples will show this: the tiny head and monstrous arm of Michelangelo's Cumean Sybil (right), a "flame-like" El Greco Christ (below), the serpentine shapes of Parmigianino (opposite, above), the long arm and truncated thigh of a Magnasco angel (opposite, below). To express power, spirituality, grace and drama are only some of the ways distortions are used. Pre-Renaissance examples might be dismissed as clumsiness due to the undeveloped state of art, but until

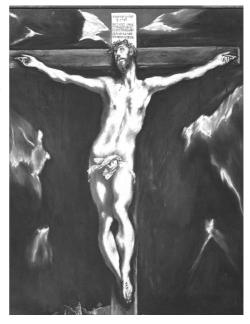


the optical emphasis of the 19th century, even the most sophisticated and skillful painters used distortion, not occasionally, but always.

This is a deeper matter than these striking examples may indicate. Compare most late 19th century academic painting—to say nothing of 20th century Classical Realism which is frankly photographic—with virtually any older painting: if the sort of distortion I emphasize here is

not necessarily apparent, the least that can be said is that the old masters always idealize.

But ihe term "idealize" has confusing connotations. If there are certain well-known idealizing adjustments — such as small heads and long legs — in practice there are no fixed ideal proportions, no fast rules, because pictorial idealizing depends on expressive intent and the dramatic situation and action of figures. Idealization actually involves distortions, or changing shapes and proportions away from optical exactitude.







Jacques-Emile Blanche said of Ingres' anatomical liberties: "Each figure, in its context, is reduced to a sign in a conventional and new language created by the artist." The same might be said of El Greco, or the others. Their anatomical liberties, the expressive freedom of their figures, create original forms which are words in a pictorial language. Just as each poet uses language in his own way, and might be said to invent a new language, so forms are a language which painters of skill and expressive goals use in personal ways. Blanche's "new language" metaphorically indicates the surprising way Ingres treats his forms.

'Colore' versus 'disegno' was not a dispute about the supremacy of color or drawing, and the issues actually involved cannot be briefly resumed. From today's perspective however, there is some truth in saying that it related to observational work versus work based on knowledge and conception. Titian's flesh is soft and transparent, and if his figures are quite idealized in our eyes, they are at least slightly more like actual people than Michelangelo's. The thunderous idealizations of Michelangelo, his apotheosis of anatomy, if less realistic in one way, has an intellectual or

spiritual aspect that is superior from a certain point of view. Michelangelo's figures inhabit a cool, spare and ethereal environment, while Titian's are bathed in a warm and earthly light.

Titian, as my own teacher used to say: "is painting", but the Tenebresques are closer to Titian than to Michelangelo. Something like the 'colore-disegno' opposition, if in an exasperatingly crude way, separates the optical orientation of what came to be called Academicism from Ingres. After representation was banned in the 1960s, the neo-traditional Classical Realists of the late 20th century considered representation the goal and acme of painting, and their hero is the famous academy head, Bouguereau (1825). I do not wish to hold Classical Realists up to ridicule. They are doing their best according to their ideas. My point is not the relative quality of their work but how an artist's orientation affects his figures.

Bouguereau was a student of Ingres, and if his work is more optical, if it has less Michelangelesque 'disegno', it is certainly more idealized than any Classical



tainly more idealized than any Classical Realist work (opposite: above, and below right). In Ingres' study for 'The Golden Age' (above), note the small head and feet, and long legs, but more particularly how the off-set neck contributes to a sinuous grace. The Bouguereau figure (opposite, below left) is as optical, compared to Ingres (note the thick, short neck and large head) as this figure is ideal compared to the Classical Realists who do not bother to correct the pose or anatomy in any way — what you see is what you get. Note, for example, the photographically realistic character of the breasts, or how the seated figure seems to have only one leg. This is what the artist saw, how, he might say, the model "was". Even



Bouguereau would have adjusted the pose and anatomy to compensate for these things. Classical Realism is simply 'étude documentaire', optical transcription. Bouguereau is illustratively idealizing, but Ingres does what painters always did.

If, in the context of Neoclassicism, Ingres is strange, he is traditional in exactly what makes him strange. Illusion is fundamental to painting. There has always been 'tromp l'œil', and certain painters are more illusionistically inclined than others. But if there is an innovation in 19th century painting, something basically, not merely stylistically new, it is the radi-

cally optical orientation which became more and more 'de rigueur' for more and more painters. This tendency was not restricted to so-called academic painters. Impressionism itself, if it has a reactionary (traditionalist or modernist) aspect, also has an important optical one.

Charles Blanc (1813), academician, art historian and follower of Ingres, protested "those modernities of painting, the search for effects, that (Ingres) considered the beginning of decadence." There was a time, during the emergence of alleged modernism, when the search for effects and over-emphasis on illusion of the academic painters was considered, and decried, as the substance of modernity.







Classical Realism, and above

THE IDEA

If art is for art's sake, if the thing itself, rather than its content or message, is the artistic, the poetic, the expressive part of art, it would indeed seem that "the medium is the message". Not the actual 'Mont Sainte-Victoire' (pages 60 and 61, above) but the painting of it, the way Cezanne paints it. Not the Virgin and a rabbit, but the way Titian paints them. In the same way, what counts is not the items of TV news themselves but absorbing them collectively yet in isolation, not the "lol" you send but generalized and instantaneous communication via a world-spanning device. The medium itself is the true meaning, the actual message. The reality, which TV or the internet cause us to live and experience, as media, is more significant than whatever content is conveyed by them.

But consider the vagina genre of Performance Art where artistes expose themselves in 'cultural' settings, or use their vaginas in unusual ways to create art which dramatizes a message. The form may be "vagina" but the message is primary — certainly for these artistes. Or consider

propaganda posters to get women into war production: what is more important, the way the women are portrayed in the posters or getting them into factories? It is possible to consider these things aesthetically, as pure form, but limiting appreciation to the form stunts understanding of them. Without love of landscape, without veneration of the Virgin, without feminism's goals, or the need for women factory workers, none of these things would have come into existence. Likewise, without the desire to diffuse and consume moving and talking pictures (to all the ends they can be used), or to communicate world wide (crucial information as well as chit-chat), television and the internet would not enjoy such success.





Telecommunications and drawing are both media, and a type of drawing can—and even must—be used to manufacture weapons. Television and the internet can be used for artistic expression but are subject to similar limitations as film. Politics has a certain nobility compared to strategies to increase factory production—vagina Performance Art, therefore, may have a nobility posters urging women to work as riveters may lack. Considered formally, however, which is more artistic? Which type of art exists

more for its own sake? The formal aspect of a vagina performance is a vagina. A vagina is a natural thing, not an artifact but, per the New Art, when chosen by an artist any object becomes art. Can we compare the poster of Rosy the Riveter and a vagina formally? This question is answered by the New Art: like each artist, each art and each work of art, is its own rule, its own value. Such comparison is illegitimate and meaningless.

How can Cezanne's Mont Sainte-Victoire paintings be compared to propaganda posters? If an aesthetic comparison is meaningless, per the New Art, it can at least be said that these works proceed from very different motivations. Unlike a vagina performance or propaganda posters, Cezanne was not trying to get anyone to do anything, neither liberate women nor manufacture bombs. To the extent propaganda posters are for getting women to make guns, they cannot be said to be for their own sake, for art's sake. We may consider them aesthetically, but that should take account of the limitations—size, color, etc.—imposed by mechanical reproduction. The least that can be said is that Cezanne's medium imposed fewer limits on him, and gave him greater scope for poetic expression.

What about Titian's Madonna: is it propaganda? As an illustration of a bible story it supports the mission of the church. On the other hand it was not made as a model for a mechanically reproduced image urging

specific action. Painting his Virgin, Titian enjoyed the same freedom with his medium as Cezanne painting his mountain. The least that can be said is that a sweet looking girl in a pleasant landscape with a cute little bunny,

if it urges us towards something, that something is a far cry from the manufacture of war material.*

Cezanne (1839) has as singular a place in the history of the second part of 19th century painting—in the second wave of modernism—as Ingres has in the first. Even in America in the 1960s, most painters still



considered him the "god of painting". In France, where pure abstraction never had the overwhelming vogue it did across the Atlantic, followers of Cezanne still existed in the 1990s.

Cezanne's painting exemplifies the early modernist analysis. This articulation of the nature of painting was a reaction to the veritable 19th century innovation: effects of light and dry optically oriented drawing which spawned work by painters like Laurens (1838, below), and Schef-



fer (1795, opposite, below). These examples also show the difficulty of untangling this history. The Laurens, despite its light effects, also embodies traditional values championed by the modernists—like attractive brush work—while the Scheffer, though his Neoclassicism is well advanced on a dry, optical path, still idealizes, or abstracts, in a way Laurens no longer does.

The struggle for the soul of painting was not a simple matter of Impressionists versus the

^{*} There are people who complain that no influence is worse than religion, and others who condemn anything connected with war. Discussion is impossible with such people.

Academy, of competing schools with distinct styles, but a confused swirl of values flowing through the work of different painters, now labeled academic, now modernist. Generally speaking the academic tendencies



were innovations, while the so-called modernists ignored those innovations, or reacted to them by cleaving to, or re-actualizing traditional values. The Modernist return to tradition, however, was itself influenced by the new thinking. If, as painting, it was reactionary, its formulation in what I call

the "early modernist analysis", uses a scientific outlook. For this reason, but also because painting was facing a novel challenge, the analysis has a character different from all previous painting theory—it is without poetic or metaphorical language, without vague talk about nature, har-

mony, morality or spirituality. Painting, it stipulated, has two aspects: the decorative and illustrative, and what it calls "true painting" is their proper integration. Its terms and intentions are strictly technical.

The decorative aspect is what Poussin called "lines and colors on the surface made with paint". These can be considered in themselves, as shapes or forms as such, quite apart from whatever they represent, but can also be understood as the physicality of the painting. A painting is not merely an image, it is an object constituted of material, and this material, the paint itself — thick, thin, grainy, creamy, applied brusquely or with care — is part of the decorative aspect.



Though non-objective or non-representational painting was not imagined in the 19th century, had it arisen, it would not have been called "abstract" but "purely decorative".*

The illustrative aspect is what a picture represents. But a line which defines or represents a figure is, to begin with, a decorative element. The decorative and illustrative aspects can be talked about separately, they can be separated in thought, or in theory, and doing so can be important and useful, but when it comes to actually painting they are inseparable. The illustrative aspect is not confined to lines intended to delineate figures, or colors intended to show something—such as blue to say "sky"—because any and every mark and color is also always part of the illustrative aspect of a painting. This is because illusion—the impression of space, volume and light—is not exclusively a function of specifically representational use of line or color, but arises from any mark no matter how random, accidental or representationally unintended. This is because of our visual experience. We have binocular vision and spend our lives

seeing, often while standing and moving. Certain visual cues, therefore, signal space and form to us even when reduced to almost nothing.

In Figure 1 the vertical, beginning lower on the page, appears nearer than the horizontals. The latter, being aligned, can seem continuous but interrupted by the vertical. A man standing in a room, a candle on a table, a tree in a field: this is



figure 1

the visual essence of such things. The relations involved are so habitual to us that we read them even into such summary marks as these. Binocular vision causes us to feel spatial relations. We transpose these feelings to two-dimensional figures according to the cues they offer. Figure 1 is organized as a helpful explanation, but any mark, alone and even more so in association with others, begins to imply form and even volume and light. A simple dot on a page is a form which comes forward with respect to the blankness around it, which thereby also becomes a form, something farther back. In figure 2, which is figure 1 rotated 90°, the line previously nearest, because lower, is again nearest because it overlaps, or cuts off,

^{*} Gustave Moreau, 1826-1898, another painter known both as academic and modernist, did experiment with pure abstraction before his death.

the line below it, like an arrow passing in front of a tree. It is possible to interpret such minimalist cues in other ways but what is impossible is to feel them and their ground as without spatial relations.

In the same way, a strong or purer color will tend to appear nearer than a dull one, though this depends on relative quantities, the qualities of the shapes that embody them, and so on. An exhaustive study might be made of how and why marks and colors as such are the foundation of illusion, but the examples given should suffice to show the ineluctable relation of space to marks, and that the most fundamental aspect of illusion is the spatial feeling arising from lines and color, from marks on a page.



figure 2

Basically, the illustrative aspect is expression of space, even if that space is "abstract", or does not represent some specific thing. A sensation of space arises from marks, whether or not they are intended to represent something. If this is not understood, if its mechanisms are not mastered, spatial feeling becomes weak, confused or even contradictory. M. C. Escher is famous for his masterful exploitation of the paradoxical possibilities inherent in the illustrative aspect. Non-representational painting always turns out to be spatial. Whether such paintings are

orderly and geometrical or made of shmushy squiggles, the forms, of whatever character, have spatial relations: some nearer, some farther.

Cezanne dreamed of drawing like Ingres. Recognizing this was out of his reach, he devised a system for himself based on the idea that everything is constructed of spheres, cones and cylinders. Whether or not things are indeed constructed this way, his system permitted Cezanne to represent volume effectively. Cezanne's drawing is always oriented to the expression of volume and space. Enchanted by the grace of Ingres' figures, draftsmen can neglect the essential — space and volume — which Ingres never does. Though Cezanne's figures may lack the sort of grace for which Ingres is famous, they never lack volumetric feeling. Furthermore, Cezanne's work is notable for how the brush work, colors and shapes have a life of their own, how what is represented arises out of the language of painting. There are no special effects or artifices of illusion, no eye-fooling tricks standing between our perception of his subject and the paint on the canvas by which he speaks. With a painter

like Chardin (this page, above) the language is so suave it can disappear in our fascination with the texture and atmosphere it generates. This is not to say that Chardin's language is less language than Cezanne's (opposite,

above), or that his illusions violate the bounds of true painting. But even work that does violate those bounds—desiccated and illusionist Neoclassicism or that of clumsy beginners—it is all still language. Painting, in whatever style, for whatever purpose, and of whatever



quality, is always colors and lines on a flat surface. It is not, in other words, equivalent to whatever is represented—it is a way of talking about it. The quality of the talk is the measure of the poetry.

The language of painting, however, is not equivalent to the decorative aspect—true painting is the right relation between the decorative and illustrative aspects. The illustrative aspect is an inevitable and ineluctable consequence of lines and colors (the decorative aspect) and visa versa. No matter how exclusively intent a painter might be on representation or reproduction, any mark he makes is nonetheless decorative in being a line or color on the surface. But this inevitability guarantees nothing about



the quality of the results. Not understanding these fundamentals leads to confusion about how painting functions, and weakens the work. The analysis must not be understood as depreciation of illusion. The teaching is that giving too much importance to illusion, and insufficient attention to the decorative aspect, leads to forgetfulness of how painting as a language should be



spoken beautifully. Painting then degenerates into illustration.

The particularity of Cezanne's drawing — volumetric solidity without Neoclassic idealization — combined with so nakedly vivid a presence of the decorative aspect, make his work a striking example of so-called



Modernist principles. But it is only the context of Neoclassical sophistication that makes Cezanne seem unprecedented or non-traditional. Part of the reaction to 19th century overemphasis on effects and

anatomy was a renewal of interest in the Italian Primitives, and painters from the 15th century like Masaccio (opposite, below left), who had not yet felt the full impact of Greek statuary as Raphael and Michelangelo did. The figures of such painters were not ungraceful but did not follow the canons of Grecian idealization. After all, there are many types of grace. Even 16th century painters like Cranach (below) still used a gracious Medieval manner. Cezanne's figures (opposite, below right) could be, and were, understood sympathetically in that perspective.

Painting was affected by the French Revolution, which is to say Enlightenment ideas or, more generally, modern thought. Practically all



painters were touched by these influences, and David, the greatest painter of his day, is the most important. But how, exactly, did these ideas — what Dostoevsky called The Idea — affect painting? It certainly did not cause painters to do things such as use more blue or straighter lines, but it did affect people's thinking, and painters are people too.

The Idea is that man can create a paradise on earth. The old ways are not good. Religion only reconciles us to misery and exploitation, and the old philosophers did nothing to improve man's estate; they

contemplated beautiful ideas in splendid isolation—they were useless and worse than useless. But the new ideal of universal prosperity and brotherhood can be realized with rational and practical thinking based on science, and the help of technology.

My thesis is that art was affected by The Idea, but I am not prejudiced against it. In many ways it has kept its promise. Millions may have been killed by the new war technology, but millions have also been saved by the new medical technology. If it is implicated in the unfortunate actions of certain regimes, it is not without a role in the unprecedented freedom and prosperity of half the world for the last two centuries. I am not an enemy of modernity. If its influence has been problematic for painting, that may not be reason enough to reject it altogether.

As committed revolutionaries, imbued with passionate resolve to change the world, painters of the 20th century were eager that their work contribute to the cause. There is only one way painting can do this: as propaganda to promote and celebrate The Revolution. But has painting not always been propaganda? Titian's equestrian portrait of Charles V (this page) for example: is it anything but an advertisement for that emperor? David's portrait of The Revolution's emperor (opposite) is so similar in form it would be disingenuous to suggest there is a radical dif-

ference between the two paintings, or even between the artists' intentions. But Titian's painting, considered generally, though frankly honoring Charles V, is more art for art's sake than David's portrait of Napoleon.

Titian presents Charles in his military and equestrian finery, but otherwise quite simply, as if he is riding into battle, but only for show. The horse is somewhat in motion but Charles, who appears



crafty but kindly, seems to be trotting at best—he is posing quietly. Charles and his horse are distinctly within the landscape, in the light of the scene. The trees and sky are treated in the same way as Charles and his horse. The painting, as a painting, is about a horseman in a landscape, and as a portrait it is personal: it says something about Charles the man.

David's Napoleon, his expression severe and commanding, is an idealized leader crossing the Alps to defeat enemies of the glorious Revolution. The features are vaguely Napoleonic, but this is not a portrait. Our hero and his horse are bathed in a light present also only on the ground under the horse's hoofs. The rest of the painting, though it represents mountains and a torn sky, from a formal point of view is a neutral backdrop serving to throw a heroic gesture of leadership into sharp relief. The painting is a masterwork but has more of the propaganda poster than the Titian. It is less art for art's sake, and more art for The Revolution's sake.

The difference may not be glaring but it is distinct. In terms of the analysis, David's painting is more illustrative. David is concerned in the first place with showing or illustrating an idea, making a non-artistic point. The glory of Napoleon and the Revolution, fine things though they may be, are not artistic things. In practice this means a certain neglect of the decorative aspect and the values of true painting. The problem



is not representation as such — not Napoleon's idealized determination as such — but how horse and rider are, to a certain extent, cut out against a backdrop instead of integrated with the space, how the painting has two lights, one pointing at the message, another to throw that message into relief. It might be thought that doing those very things is craft of a high order, and in a sense it is, but the art being practiced is

of a lower order than that aimed at by true painting because its goal is lower. That lower goal is contribution to the realization of The Idea. Revolutionaries may regard that as painting's highest goal, to which all else should be subordinated, but the Muses do not agree. They hold that what is choice-worthy for its own sake is highest. The Revolution may be noble but, as the old sages warned, earthly affairs will always be more or less messy. That was true of the Napoleonic adventure, which ended as we know, and of everything that has happened since.

The revolutionary ideal — The Idea — can only be supreme in the modern orientation. Its ultimate goal, the purpose behind political freedom and universal peace and prosperity, is physical well-being. But physical well being for what? At this question, The Idea, with its practical and material orientation, loses focus in talk about individual choice and happiness. This is the foundation of the New Art.

The old art cannot be maintained in the new — modern — situation, where optical reproduction is the method, and socially beneficial illustration the goal. In reaction to the excesses of the New Art, the Classical Realists started their movement in America in the 1980s. They theorize painting as strictly rational, and therefore teach optically accurate reproduction using Sight-size (a technique for reproduction of an immobile model in a studio) and Munsell (a system for accurate color reproduction devised for industry). But mastery of these quickly learned techniques are useless for anything other than 'étude documentaire'. The Classical Realists were warned: they were not the traditionalists they pretended to be. They took no heed and, as predicted, by 2010 their productions had devolved into a species of the New Art they had hoped to supplant, and into which their work, and they, are now absorbed.

At Napoleon's fall David fled to Brussels where he continued to work and teach. The monarchy was restored, and there followed a series of political up-heavals in France and Europe. If, by the beginning of the 20th century, practically all artists were adherents of The Idea—and continue so to this day—during the 19th century the political opinions of painters had the same diversity as the population generally. If Courbet and Zola were anti-clerical revolutionaries, Degas and Cezanne were not. Art, painting and sculpture in particular, were not politicized, and artists were not politically polarized. When an art is practiced without concern



One might think that David's revolutionary feelings were understandable or even admirable—devotion to freedom, passionate patriotism-or the excusable excitement of heroic and historic times. This is to misunderstand the French Revolution, and what went on in Paris in 1792 particularly. David was a Montagnard-a Jacobin-a partisan of Robespierre, and friends with Marat who was one of the greatest criminals of the revolution, with particular responsibility for 'les massacres de september'. Marat was a narrow-minded and obsessive propagandist whose career consisted of exciting fear, dissension and blood-lust. David admired this man, and after his assassination used painting to elevate him to the status of Martyr for a Noble Cause. That Marat is still seen as David would have us see him is testament to the power of his art, and the propaganda potential of painting.*

for its essence, it degenerates. The influence of The Idea on painting was not yet directly political. But the illustrative tendency, which for political reasons David gave to some of his painting, was transmitted to his students, and his artistic ascendancy was such that few painters escaped his influence. In consequence, the business of painters became not more political but more and more about effects and storytelling in realistic illustrations and scenes of pathos. Again, the problem was not effects or story illustration as such — true painting can do those things. The problem was concentration on illustrative concerns to the detriment of decorative, or abstract, or formal concerns.

The word "abstract" has come to mean non-representational. Strictly speaking non-representation is impossible. Any mark is a form and, as such, has spatial relations — be they clear or vague — within the overall "form" (the picture as a whole). Initially "abstract" indicated the distance or difference between the subject and the form which represented it. Even the most carefully illusionistic figure, say the Bouguereau on page 57 — and even the Classical Realist figure next to it — is "abstracted" from the model to some extent. In practise this means simplification. However detailed a painting, even if the blue tinge of subcutaneous veins and the barely visible blur caused by tiny hair follicles are lovingly reproduced, it is still abstracted, still a simplified representation of the model. Beyond simplification, however, painting uses signs, for example "overlaps", to

^{*} David's study of Marat's head, in the Carnavalet Museum in Paris, was certainly made from... "life", and is an astonishing painting.

170	3 Bouc	her 177	0		Cezanne		
	1732 Fragonard			1806	_	Degas Monet	
		1748 Day		vid	1825	1840 Renoir	<u> </u>
1700		1750		180	00	1850	1900

suggest volume. Such painting language is an aspect of abstraction. The word "abstract" was initially used to theorize or understand this.

The figures on pages 62-63 are abstractions—extreme ones!—of a man in a room, a tree in a landscape, etc. The illustrative problem arises from forgetfulness of this aspect of painting. If certain painters—the Dutch still-life painters of the 17th century for example—carried illusion as far as possible, none of the old masters lost sight of basics. It was only in the 19th century, under pressure from The Idea, when people's approach not only to politics, but to everything, was affected that this problem began.

In painting the reaction to this pressure took many forms. The analysis of the early modernists, on which I am laying such stress, was itself affected, for it, too, was scientific in character. There were non-scientific reactions also. Maurice Denis (1870) and Emile Bernard (1868) had catholic ideas about art; Kandinsky (1866) wrote a famous book—'On Spirituality in Art' (published 1912)—while Mondrian (1872) and Malevich (1879) pioneers of pure abstraction, explained and justified their painting spiritually and theologically. I do not dismiss their ideas and theories; the analysis, however, is the key to the story of art from the French Revolution and the innovations of 19th century Neoclassicism until the triumph of the New Art. It does not necessarily reflect the thinking of many of the people involved, but it does explain the fundamental theoretical

and practical painting problems with which they were obliged to grapple.

Scientific theories of light had nothing to do with the emergence of Impressionism. Its origins are Renoir's encounter with Diaz (1863), and Monet's studies, in 1858, with Eugène Boudin (1824) a painter 44 years his senior. As a young painter Monet, like Renoir, used 'le style noir'.







From the last years of the 18th century, painters like Corot had spent more and more time painting outdoors. The Barbizon school, of which Diaz was a member, has been characterized as both Romantic and Realist. I am not unsympathetic to the invention and use of labels. Short of omniscience, we require guide posts and general ideas, and these particular terms are perhaps not useless regarding 19th century literature. But understanding painting movements in terms of literary ones, even if not altogether misguided, is not necessarily helpful. Also, French emphasis on literature is a prejudice we are not obliged to share. Characterizing the Barbizon school, with the exception of Millet, as Romantic when such 17th century painters as Claude Lorrain (below) and Salvador Rosa are so much more so, or Realist when Le Nain (opposite), Adriaen Brouwer or de Hooch are so much more so, is confusing. Barbizon school painting uses nature in a more work-a-day manner than Claude, though hardly without poetry. It is not Realist as much as straight-forward, allowing the poetry in the subject to arise out of itself, rather than wringing dreams out of it like a soaked sponge.

Monet's 'Impression, Sunrise' (above, right) is considered a pioneering and emblematic work of Impressionism. But in the museum of Le Havre,



which has the leavings of Boudin's studio, there are remarkable paintings (above left) which show that Monet owes everything to Boudin. This is not to slight Monet. Titian likewise "owes everything" to Bellini and Giorgione—and Van Dyke to Rubens, etc.—and Monet

went on to do notably original work. The point is that Impressionism is not what its myth makes of it. It is not a novelty based on new ways of thinking and seeing and scientific theories. It is neither more nor less than what certain painters, who rejected Neoclassical fads and stuck with the attitudes of the old masters, had already and always been doing.

Stated as starkly as possible: Neoclassical fads turn painting into mechanical reproduction, while the old masters treat painting as poetry. Late 20th century Classical Realism is the most blatant and complete transformation of painting into mechanical reproduction. In 2010 that movement's founder and greatest exponent, Jacob Collins, complained to me that the Classical Realists — his own students — had taken to copying photographs!

Various things supposedly demonstrate the revolutionary character of Impressionist paintings. They are in a very high key; but there is a great deal of old master painting in a high key: the frescos of Tiepolo, or the tempera illuminations of Medieval books. This is not even a novelty in oil painting, given certain paintings by Turner and Rubens. Is Impressionism novel in its use of pure color? Oil paintings tend to darken with age, and the bright pigments used by the old masters were sometimes fugitive. When Rembrandt came back into fashion in the 19th century, his work, dingy with dirt and old varnish, exerted an influence referred to as The Brown School. This misunderstanding of Rembrandt was not cleared up until the 20th century. Renoir explained that Diaz's bright colors had darkened by the end of the 19th century, but the paintings of old masters like Hieronymus Bosch, to mention only his, are often still remarkably bright. Even were we to grant use of pure color as Impressionism's novelty, would that make it modern? Would using very bright colors be a conceptual break-through, an era, a radically new kind of painting? Is it not simply a happy and healthy resurgence of the love of color so natural to many painters? Impressionism is notable also for brush strokes and paint that are almost sculptural. But, again, if not necessarily in the same manner, and while absent from Neoclassicism, one finds those qualities in the old masters.

As the Impressionists came into vogue, critics and theorists began to explain and justify their work on scientific grounds, in talk about the spectrum of visible light, opposite colors, and black not being a color because not on the spectrum. This exasperated Renoir — he disparaged it as

"literature" — but it was taken seriously by many painters, notably the Divisionists, so-called because they used specks of color as if they were rays of light from a prism. But using "broken-color" is an old painting trick. It is how convincing flesh tones are made. Does using broken color for a scientific reason — with questionable results in the case of Divisionism — make it modern?



Van Gogh and Cezanne* were long counted among the Impressionists even though their painting has nothing of the optical quality of Monet's Cathedrals and Haystacks. Renoir was never an Impressionist in the sense given that term by theorists and critics. Monet's greatest masterpieces, the Water Lilies, if they owe something to Impressionism — namely his long study of light and nature — owe even more to his feeling for painting itself, the texture of paint, the excitement of color spread across a canvas. The Water Lilies are one of the most important influences on the American Abstract Expressionists — if their optical quality were their main virtue this could hardly be true. As for thick paint, the old word was 'impasto'. It was practiced over the centuries by painters like Ribera and Rembrandt (above).†

What, in practical terms, is Impressionism? It is painting from life, usually in sunlight, usually landscape, without any black and with special attention to light effects. One Impressionist technique is dabs of the opposite color next to whatever color should stand out. Blue irises, for example, get dabs of pure orange by them. But this particular trick, which was not unknown to traditional painting, is not unrelated to the Neoclassical obsession with optical tricks. In its particular concern with representing light, and only in that way, Impressionism may correctly be considered "modern", an innovation. Before the Impressionists, Diaz, Jongkind and others painted outdoors with bright colors. The only difference was that effects were not an over-riding concern.

Properly understood then, Impressionism is traditional painting as preserved by painters born at the end of the 18th century like Corot,

^{*} They were later categorized as Post-Impressionists. This is only one example of how art historians scramble to rationalize their narratives and the dangers of generalization and labels.

[†] Changes in the making of paint and available pigments caused some 19th century painters to practice 'impasto' not merely with white, but with any color. This is an aspect of the decline in the practice of oil painting as a medium, not a modern innovation.

and revived by painters born in the 1820s like Puvis, combined with the optical obsession developed by Neoclassicism which, however, it restricts to rendering effects of sunlight, and does so with rougher brushwork than Neoclassics might use, but not rougher than Delacroix, Magnasco or Titian. Though all were classified as Impressionists at some point, Renoir, Van Gogh, Cezanne and Bazille do not fit this definition. Sisley, much of Pissarro and a great deal of Monet does, to say nothing of hundreds of other painters who practiced Impressionism later on. With these

provisos, the term "Impressionism" defines a newfangled approach to painting, but new only in what it shares with Neoclassical academicism, while Neoclassical academicism breaks with tradition more profoundly.

Post-Impressionism is different from Impressionism because it drops the optical obsession. Is it then fully traditional? What about the



modern look or feel of work by painters like Gauguin (1848) Emile Bernard (1868, this page) and Maurice Denis (1870)? Did Daumier (page 47) not already have this look? Maurice Denis famously formulated the analysis in these terms, "Before it is a warhorse, a naked woman or a story, a painting is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order." This formula is very similar to Poussin's: "Pictures of anything under the sun, made with lines and colors on a flat surface." But there is an important difference. Where Poussin says a painting is "a picture of something" (made with lines and colors), Denis says a painting is "colors and lines" (which make a picture of something)!

If Puvis understood Poussin exactly as Poussin intended to be understood—the illustrative and decorative aspects on equal footing—he did so in the context of the illustrative exaggerations of Neoclassicism. The analysis, calling attention to neglect of the illustrative aspect, though strictly speaking it was careful, exact and balanced, eventually had the effect of over-compensation for Neoclassicism's illustrative error. The



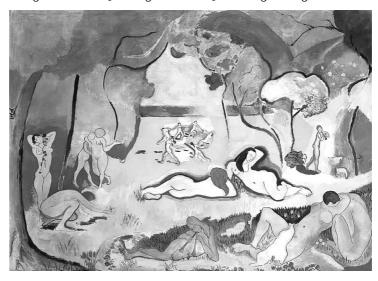
need to react-against imparts an impetus which can take on a life of its own: Denis' formulation Q.E.D. Painters started seeing the decorative aspect, what today we would call abstraction, as the essential part of painting. For the work of many Post-Impressionists the consequences were not radical. But if the illusionism typical of so much painting from Raphael to Impressionism was not a notable feature of Post-Impressionism, it did concern itself with the grace typical of French painting ever since students of Michelangelo, the so-called Mannerists, founded the School of Fontainbleau. Rosso, (above), one of the founders of that school, was principally a decorative painter in the strict sense: he decorated walls.

Traditional decorative painting is not concerned with elaborate illusion or effects of deep space. It uses tromp-l'oeil to mimic mouldings but is more concerned with pleasant colors and graceful shapes than accurate representation. With Rosso, beyond the Michelangelesque but casual anatomy, realism is secondary. The closely packed figure arrangements create an agreeable low-relief. Illusion goes little farther than enlivening our perception of the wall. Post-Impressionist concern with the decorative aspect was not a radical departure from traditional painting even if, in the context of academic pretension to tradition, it was denounced by its enemies as crude and "modern".

In reaction to the dry, cold, pompous, histrionic and boring approach of

many of the 'ateliers' where art training was supposed to be occurring, and sometimes prompted by religious or mystical sentiments, painters like Bernard and Denis turned to the pre-Renaissance—to Cimabue, stained glass, and other Primitive art—not only for inspiration but also to justify a freer manner of representation which was only non-traditional in flaunting Neoclassicism's non-artistic obsessions.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is likewise peculiar in how, despite the name it gave itself, it seems more inspired by Michelangelo, and even Raphael himself, than the Primitive painters it claims as models. These artists could consider their own work "pre-Raphaelite" because they understood "Raphaelitism" as Neoclassicism. The Neoclassics saw themselves as the heirs of Raphael, prolonging and perfecting the Renaissance tradition. Neoclassicism, though in fact an innovation, had so long and authoritatively draped itself in the mantle of tradition, that it eventually labeled what it considered deviation — however profoundly traditional in fact — as "modern". Cloisonnism, Synthétisme, Symbolism, the Nabis, and Fauvism — respectfully leaving aside religious, spiritual, philosophical, social and other non-artistic explanations and justifications of historians, critics and the painters themselves — are, from the standpoint of painting itself, about restoring the decorative aspect of painting, and fleeing fads like 'le style noir' and Brown School, which had driven color out of painting. Over emphasis on the illustrative aspect also drives color out of painting — the more painting is about reproducing a thing, the more col-



or is restricted to the colors to be copied, to mechanical reproduction.

The bright colors and freer forms of Fauvism, and the flat, diagramatic forms of Cubism, are emblematic of the new phase of Modernism: its second wave. The first wave is the reaction, by painters like Puvis and Manet, to the mechanically reproductionist tendency of Neoclassicism. They returned to the old masters, and their analysis served to revive awareness of the decorative aspect of painting. For painters of the first wave, this awareness led to renewed understanding of painting as a poetic language in which to speak about a subject, rather than as an inert tool for merely reproducing it. In the second wave the decorative aspect is not merely restored, it is glorified.

The essence of the illustrative aspect is the sensation of space. Nonobjective or abstract painting is necessarily illustrative in that sense. Abstract forms, strictly speaking, are figures, and as such cannot avoid spatial relations. But the illustrative aspect also concerns what is usually meant by that word — pictures of things: apples, mountains, people. At another level it indicates story. A painting might not just show generic people — if they happen to be Hera, Athena, Aphrodite, Paris and Hermes, the painting illustrates 'The Judgement of Paris', a story from Ovid. When storytelling illustration is tinged with propaganda, like David's equestrian portrait of Napoleon, it becomes "content". When, as a Fauvist, Matisse painted 'Joy of Life' (opposite) showing generic figures in a landscape, we might say the content is natural bodily happiness: dancing, making love, relaxing in the sun. On the other hand, the bright yellow, red, pink and green, and the arrangement of dark lines, can also be considered the content, and at the dawn of the 20th century, the form — line, color, shape — indeed came to be considered content.

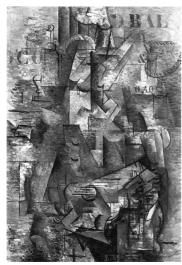
What is called "Modernism", what I emphasize as the second wave of what began as a reactionary movement, now became Academicism's evil twin. Representation, storytelling, was the goal of painting for the Neoclassics. For 19th century painters who returned to the old masters (the first wave), painting was a poetical language, not a merely reproductive or representational process—they restored the illustrative and decorative aspects to their proper relation which they called "true painting". In the second wave the Neoclassical error was reversed. The decorative aspect became all important and the illustrative aspect was progressively reduced to its most basic expression: a sensation of space.

Cubism is the perfect example; the subject, whether person, place or thing, is merely an excuse for formal relations of shapes and colors — an excuse sometimes so confounded in a low relief of jagged, overlapping flat shapes, that it becomes invisible. Cubism is not illusionistic but its shallow space is always strongly felt.

Cubism had two phases, the so-called Analytic followed by the Synthetic. The difference? The latter is sparer with even shallower space (Braque: opposite above and below). The theorists of Cubism, secondary followers of Picasso and Braque, established a sort of academy — though Picasso went on to other manners and Braque did not participate. With enthusiastic critics and historians, these theorists created a myth that Cubism was inspired by African art and shows forms from several angles. Despite the huge success of this theory, it is nonsense. Picasso himself says so. Some Cubist painting was later done on such lines, but not by Picasso or Braque. Cubism was inspired by Cezanne and enthusiasm for abstraction as the essential and principal aspect of painting.

Regarding the alleged African influence, the faces of 'Les Damoiselles d'Avignon' (detail, below) — a painting which is proto-Cubist more than Cubist properly speaking — might seem a proof. Three of the five faces have no African qualities — the one on the left might be Amerindian. All are notable for large noses but African masks have small noses as often as large. The two faces on the right are asymmetrical and have sculptural noses. African masks, by contrast, are always symmetrical and are usually sculptural everywhere. It is not inconceivable that Picasso was influenced by African masks, in some way, for aspects of these two faces, but it cannot be maintained that African art is the inspiration for Cubism





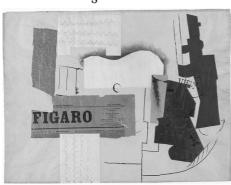
as such. African art may have influenced certain Post-Impressionists, Cubists and Expressionists. I am not seeking to exclude this possibility any more than I wish to exclude Japanese art as an influence. The flatness of the latter certainly emboldened the already lively interest of certain late 19th century painters in the decorative aspect. African art, likewise, may have suggested strategies of abstraction to certain painters. Both influences, to whatever extent they were important in the work of particular painters, had the same fundamental effect — helping painters do what they were already do-

ing: developing the decorative aspect radically.

The illustrative aspect of Cezanne, his forms and light, are strongly felt. But Cezanne's manner, his abstracted forms and brushwork, are a pointer towards the second wave: dominance of the decorative aspect.

Two other influences contributed to the Cubism: the reaction against Neoclassical academicism's illustrative exaggeration of course, but also renewed pressure from The Idea. Painters born up until the 1870s, if they were political, were so for non-artistic reasons. But those born in the 1880s, those who came of age around 1900, started to confound painting and politics in a way reminiscent of the French Revolution, when Neoclassical painting, which had begun in antiquarian enthusiasm, became, mutatis mutandis, a form of virtue signaling.

The emergence of the second wave was simultaneous with the progress



of Marxism among artists. Marxism, at that point, played no direct role in painting, as it did after the first World War with Social Realism. The reason so many painters fell under the spell of Marxism had nothing to do with art. The Idea had again become a force. As in the years leading

up to the French Revolution, society had fallen under the spell of the Enlightenment and revolutionary ideas. So now, as the battle of Waterloo and the royal restorations fell into the past, and revolutions again rocked European society, The Idea gained new power behind a new mask.

If Marxism is the most characteristic expression of The Idea, at a more fundamental level it is the triumph of science, propelled by the success of technology, which underlies it. Marxism can fairly be qualified as Post-Christian — or morality stripped of religious doctrine and trappings — but fundamentally Marxism is scientific. Dialectical Materialism is sociological chemistry. Social elements — the bourgeoisie and the proletariat for example — interact in such a way that, eventually and inevitably, a one-world Socialist government must emerge. This end-of-history will be a paradise where everyone will receive according to their needs and contribute according to their abilities. Some Marxists were willing to wait for the mechanical workings of history to take their course. Others — the ones who get our attention — were impatient. Though there was constant debate about this, the hotheads always won the argument. Marxist movements are driven by moral enthusiasm, but Marxism itself is coldly mechanistic.

The plunge into the second wave was not influenced by Marxist political fervor directly, but dialectical materialism did play a roll. The French Revolution had recruited all aspects of life to the cause. The Idea, in its evolving forms—revolutionary theory and revolutionary enthusiasm—again did so. Given that the utopia will ineluctably emerge, a new art corresponding to that ideal society must likewise emerge. And just as social struggle would hasten the political result, so artists strove to hasten the emergence of the future art. In the 19th century Marx gave no recipe for painting, but in the 20th century Stalin did.

Very little of Stalin's Communist inspired Social Realist painting is noticed today. It is even ignored because it is morally embarrassing and an artistic failure. It failed because there is nothing artistic about Marxism just as there is nothing artistic about politics—and many other things. Politics cannot generate art, and when Marxists tried, the result—illustrations of the proletariat enjoying the fruits of Communism and plutocrats getting their comeuppance—was silly. This failure, though a greater and more ridiculous one than Neoclassic decadence, had the same cause: propagandistic intentions drive the poetry out of painting, which then falls into the state of minor art.

If the overtly political conception of painting's future — Social Realism — was short-lived, painters at the dawn of the 20th century imagined something more serious and truly revolutionary. Social evolution, via dialectical materialism, was driving history towards its end point, the final and ideal society: Communism. Painting also must be subject to dialectical materialism. The workers must be liberated from their chains, and painting must be liberated from its benighted past. The reaction to academic illustrative exaggeration was growing awareness of the decorative aspect — this was the dialectic. Where would the struggle, between established art and emergent art, lead? The answer: farther in the same direction: more and more abstraction. The painting ideal, therefore, would be extreme abstraction or a purely decorative art. The past is representation and illusion, the future is pure form, form for itself. What came to be called "abstract" painting was theorized as the essential, future, and final form of painting. This utopian finality is not directly related to political Marxism, but does arise from the logic of dialectical materialism.

The dream of pure abstraction, or purely decorative painting, developed before World War I, and was even realized in the work of painters like Malevich. But the drive towards pure abstraction was baffled in the decades between the wars. Cubism and Suprematism had all but done away with representation, but Social Realism and Surrealism saved it. Illustration was politically useful to Social Realism. For Surrealism representation was intriguing, amusing, dream-like and more interestingly psychoanalytic than storyless pictures. Also, the Surrealists were dedicated Marxists, and in the 1920s and '30s Stalin's word was law, and for Stalin "bourgeois formalism" was out. Another factor which hampered abstractionist enthusiasm is that painters have a natural tendency towards representation, because pure abstraction, like Communism, is cold and austere. This is because it is theoretical and scientific. Painting, like all poetic things, is naturally warm, human, and even voluptuous. There is some old painting that can be qualified as cold or austere, but it is cold and austere in a warm and voluptuous way.

But once the prestige of Marxism, and Social Realism, started to wear thin after World War II, utopian abstraction could triumph, and that triumph was brutal and uncompromising. Abstract painting—or, more exactly, abstract painters, critics, collectors, galleries, museums and publishers—denied representation to painters for three decades, from

the 1960s to the 1990s. Their methods were exclusion, ridicule and demonization. Representational painters were called irrelevant and fascist. It was the inevitable fruit of the Marxist seed from which this extremism had grown. It damaged the careers of many painters, and was destructive to painting itself.

With the banning of representation, drawing was no longer needed. It was labeled bourgeois* and chased from schools—this literally happened in France. Drawing was reintroduced in the 1990s, after heated debate, but in the diminished form in which it was by then understood. Much the same thing occurred everywhere, and today, despite the exponential multiplication of art institutions of all kinds, painting education worthy of the name no longer exists. Schools of commercial art, as well as the academies of eastern Europe which were less affected by "Modernism", have contributed nothing to a painting revival, and the Classical Realist, or New Realist academies are a farce.

Painters of the second wave — Picasso, Mattise, Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Miro — either never abandoned representation, or painted representationally before plunging into pure Abstraction or, like Malevich, returned to it after having taken that plunge. Kandinsky's forms were, for him, spiritual content. He did not see his work as pure painting, as liberated from representation it any final sense, or to consist of decorative or abstract forms without meaning. Mondrian's Abstraction relates to his early paintings of trees. Malevich considered his harshly geometrical shapes to be objects — Suprematism is representational in that respect. In terms of the analysis, the erratic forms of Cubism, the polygons of Suprematism, Miro's and Kandinsky's squiggles, are illustrative in that they are inevitably spatial. These painters were aware of this.

The Expressionists (Kokoschka, Schmidt-Rottluff, etc.), who were second wave in emphasizing the decorative aspect, insisted, as their name suggests, on the expressive or poetic aspect of painting. The Surrealists, while emphasizing humor and strange visions, believed that art arises from the unconscious, a theory that oriented poetry in certain directions, but did not drive it from their work.

The first generation of Abstract Expressionists, advancing beyond the second wave, constitute a third wave, which includes aspects of Expressionism and Surrealism. Most thought of themselves as one or the other,

^{*} As used by Stalin the word "bourgeois" was anti-abstract; as used by third wave abstractionists it was anti-representation. The difference relates to Western Marxist attitudes before and after WWII.

and often both, and the content of their paintings was understood to be an unconscious outpouring of their psyches. From the point of view of the analysis, however, the various Abstract Expressionist manners—the slashes of Franz Kline, the smushes of de Kooning, the flames of Clifford Still—are simply form with spatial relations. All these artists had been trained to draw and given a theoretical grounding by older second wave painters, notably Hans Hofmann, himself a student of Matisse. All had worked representationally, usually as Social Realists. In the 1970s one Abstract Expressionist, Philip Guston, reverted to politically oriented representation. It was a sensation and an outrage. Guston's violation of the sacred principle of non-representation was hotly debated among painters, critics and historians.

The next generation of painters were the dying gasp of the third wave. They never learned to draw, and their grounding in Modernist principles was partial and confounded with the theories of Surrealism which are not artistic but psychological. These painters: Minimalists, Neo-dadists and a second and third generation of Abstract Expressionists, were pioneers of the New Art.

This dying gasp is characterized by feebleness. Awareness of the relation between the illustrative and decorative aspects was gone. Their only inheritance from Modernism was a doctrinaire conviction that Abstraction had become the only historically valid mode of painting, and to them Abstraction meant only application of paint nonrepresentationally. How does painting work? The question was never asked. By the 1970s the only echo of the old teaching was the concept of "ambiguous space", or a grudging recognition that spatial relations occur unavoidably among patches of paint. For a brief time in the 1970s ambiguous space became a perplexity, a problem to overcome. This was achieved with Conceptual Art, and space was never again a topic, in any serious way, for art training.

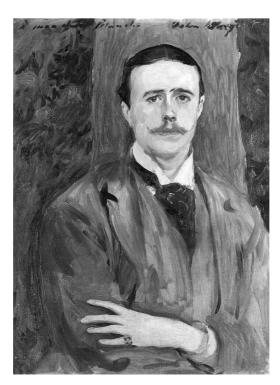
The decorative extremism of the third wave had insisted on flatness as the truth, reality and essence of painting. Poussin's "on a flat surface" was over-emphasized, and became all that was left of the old understanding. The ideologically passionate second wave reaction to optical painting led to a radicalization of the decorative aspect to the point where, with the third wave, even abstracted representation was banished. Eventually space itself — or, more exactly, awareness of

it—even the shallow or vague space retained by Cubism and Abstract Expressionism, was dropped by the New Art.

Painting lost its bearings. Painting technique was gone, but the real problem was not there. Guided by non-artistic ideas, painters disqualified themselves from doing anything related to what painting might do, except for whatever happy accidents they stumbled on thanks to random procedures. Such an impoverished conception of painting is a form of personal therapy at best. But given art's prestige, the psychological effects of "being a painter", while covering large canvases without having any idea what you are doing, are probably negative.

If what I am saying sounds strange, it is without originality. Exactly these ideas were held more than a century ago by men whose authority might give us pause. As an example I will translate a passage from Marcel Proust. It is from the preface to a book by his friend Jacques-Emile Blanche, 'Propos de Peintre, de David à Degas'. This preface was probably written in 1918. Blanche, a student of Manet, was among the first wave Modernists who persisted into the 20th century — he died in 1942. (Maurice Denis, a standard-bearer of the second wave, and Blanche were close friends. Their correspondence is published.)

It would seem that Jacques-Blanche would adhere to the saying of Maurice Denis (Maurice Denis with whom—as with Vuillard— I do not quite agree), "Before it is a warhorse, a naked woman or an anecdote, a painting is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order." But if Blanche objects to this, it is from an excess of French traditionalism. To show this, I will cite a few lines from his magnificent pages written to glorify the old masters of our country: "I protest against that infinitesimal place left in M. Denis' theories for sensibility and emotion, which, after all, are the most precious part of intelligence, for the faculty to touch us of Delacroix, Millet and Corot, those giants of the 19th the century. The objection to representation and copying nature of the 'néo-impressionists' will result in formulas leaving no place for anything but reason to the detriment of human sentiment, of sensibility. It will lead to an art strictly ornamental and decorative, barely different from that of the Persians and Chinese. It will be the end of painting as it was always conceived by our race..."



Portrait of Jacques-Emile Blanche by John Singer Sargent, 1886

CONTENT

The last serious painting education, the last education which culminated in an internationally influential school of painting which has retained its prestige, was given by Hans Hofmann to those Americans who became the Abstract Expressionists. The central maxim of Hofmann's teaching is even still well known: "push and pull". Hofmann's teaching is also the last gasp of the early modernist analysis. His lapidary formula suggests the relation between the illustrative and decorative aspects.

As a third wave modernist Hofmann understood the illustrative aspect as fundamentally spatial rather than representational per se. Like



Malevitch, he understood lines and colors as representing themselves. Beginning as an Expressionist (second wave) he was the shepherd who led his flock of American painters to the promised land of pure abstraction, or non-objective painting, what came to be known as Action Painting, or Abstract Expressionism.

His principle of "push and pull" is nicely illustrated by his own work (this page). The idea is clear. The rectangle (of dark blue) pushes (or pulls) toward us, and the patch of

white in the upper right pulls (or pushes) inward or away. His rectangles and smears of color are spatial in the same manner as Figure 1 (page 62), where overlapping alone does all the pushing and pulling. In fact Hofmann's teaching emphasized figure drawing, not lectures on theory.

Anatomy and illusion were not important to Hofmann's figure drawing teaching. What counted was capturing the expression, or character of a figure powerfully, with every mark speaking both decoratively and illustratively (spatially). Figures are understood as forms in the context of the page, such that a figure — a form — becomes The Form, or the composition. A figure drawing for Hofmann should already be a composition, a finished work, a page-transforming abstraction.

This drawing by Lee Krasner, done as a Hofmann student, mixing Cubism and Expressionism, is typical—a vortex of forms moving over the surface and in and out of the space. Previously, like everyone else, Krasner studied so-called "classical" drawing (below). This earlier work, typical of the 1920s, is related to Social Realism. Diego Rivera, the Mexican communist muralist, was extremely popular, but The Idea was not necessarily expressed in openly Marxist terms. The term Social



Realism was current in America, but effectively the same thing was also called Realism, Regionalism, Realist Revival or American Scene, and the Works Progress Administration, an organ of American socialism, employed or promoted young artists like Krasner.

As painting, Social Realism, both Soviet and American, suffered the consequences of propagandistic instrumentalization (an illustrative tendency) but Post-Impressionism remained a growing influence, and Social Realism was consequently marked by the simplifications (abstractions) and graphic (decorative) awareness of Modernism. In the 1920s and '30s

therefore, three factors intersect: 1 - Social Realism, 2 - fading but still present Academicism (with its illusion and anatomy), and, 3 - Post-Impressionism. This early Krasner drawing exemplifies this triple influence. The Social Realist need for illustration, and that art still mattered in society—as architectural decoration in particular—blocked the decorative radicalization of post- or 'néo-Impressionism' which delayed the triumph of third wave abstraction, of purely decorative painting.





Before the war American artists travelled to Europe to drink the sacred waters of art, as they had been doing ever since the 18th century. In the 1920s that water was Post-Impressionism, and the fount was Hans Hofmann. He taught the post-Cezanne, Cubist, "advanced", "progressive" and "revolutionary" kind of work young artists were hungry for. American painters and educators like Cameron Booth and Vaclav Vytlacil went to Munich and Capri to study

with Hofmann; Booth and Vytlacil were professors in Minneapolis, and later at the Art Students League in New York. They convinced Hofmann to come to America where, during the Spanish Civil War, he gave lectures on art to raise money for the Communists. I point this out as an instance of the overwhelming influence of The Idea among artists, an influence which has lasted into the 21st century. My own teacher, Aaron Kurzen, attended those lectures. From him I learned drawing as it had been taught in the 1930s.

I was born into a family of artists. As a child I experienced the old art world, where the various currents of painting all flowed in the same direction. My father, like Kurzen, thought of himself as a Surrealist though he did many sorts of painting, notably Expressionism. Kurzen, and many others, did the same. I grew up in New York where, at a very young age, I was free to explore the museums and galleries where Contemporary



Art was emerging in forms called Pop, Op, and Pop-Op. I recall: Cornell boxes, random stuffs hanging from ceilings, dark rooms with abstract sculptures making strange movements and sounds, walking on mattresses, the scandal of artists defecating on gallery floors, Warhol's Brillo boxes and Happenings. It was all new, fashionable, intriguing and fun. It had the innocence of sincere experimentation, suffered no egregious financial taint, and proceeded side by side with second and third wave painting.



But the charm wore off quickly when Abstraction suddenly became 'de rigueur' and anyone who failed to "advance" was cut off. Those cut off included my father, and many other painters whose work defined art for me—"promising young talents" of the 1950s.*

At fourteen I became the student of Aaron Kurzen, and later a sort of apprentice, living with him for many years. Kurzen has no celebrity, but after the war he organized groups of printmakers, in association with painters like Wolf Kahn and Paul Resika. In the 1980s he was the star of the short-lived Museum of Holography where he showed his Holograms in Assem-

blage (page 109). As a student of Booth in Minneapolis he was given a show by the WPA in the 1930s, and awarded a scholarship to the Art Students League where he studied with Vytlacil. In New York he met his future wife, Saja, who had been secretary to Walter Arensberg, a surrealist poet active in the dada movement, friend and patron of Marcel Duchamp. Saja also was friends with Duchamp, and so Kurzen encountered him and became a disciple.

Kurzen spent 3 years (1942-45) as a corporal in the 751st tank battalion, serving in Africa and Italy where he managed to meet and study with de Chirico, and saw the work of Michelangelo by crawling over it with a

^{*} The last three painters featured in Eric Protter's 1963 'Painters on Painting' were Robert d'Arista, Herbert Katzman and George Rhoads. This proves nothing about the quality of their work but does reflect how a certain kind of Expressionist work was taken seriously until the mid 1960s.

flashlight where it was hidden underground. In the 1950s Kurzen played a little known but important role in Neo-Dada, for through his teaching, and the example of his work, future Neo-Dadaists discovered art from a Duchampian perspective.

At eighteen I was admitted to Hofmann's school, then run by his students. Mercedes Matter taught drawing, and according to her I mastered the approach. But it was not until much later, after dropping out of three other art schools, that I understood what I had learned from Hofmann's students. Meanwhile I haunted the museums, though I never met my fellow students there. I also helped my father, George Rhoads, build his now famous ball-machines, and Kurzen make his now forgotten Holograms in Assemblage. I lived intimately with both the New Art and the old art, with people for whom surrealism and dada were the enthusiasms of their youth, and still their guiding stars. Those were not my directions but I was not in rebellion, and neither were they. As painters, Kurzen and my father worked non-figuratively, but my father had other manners, including a "Renaissance style". As for Kurzen, he said: "I want the new and the old" (opposite, Kurzen, work from 1975-85).

My own early painting was done under the spell of Expressionism, with slashing strokes of pure color (page 88, above, 1975). When my direction was diagnosed as "classical" (page 88 below, and page 89) it was pronounced "irrelevant". I was denounced as fascist, and subjected to petty indignities and exclusions.

A childhood friend, Matt Freedman, was an artist who taught at the University of Pennsylvania. He had started a movement in the 1970s, Clumpism, into which he drafted me as the only other member. Over the years we elaborated theories and manifestos, and in 2009 there was a show of Clumpism in New York, with Matt's sculptures, my paintings,

and four collaborative pieces. Outside the gallery there was a show of Street Art which received notice in the Times.

Jacob Collins was also a Kurzen student. As Kurzen's teaching assistant in the 1980s I had already known him. When Collins launched the Classical Realists movement I tried, without success, to warn him, and the Classical Realists, about the problems with their direction.

'Sing Along with Stockhausen'—Judith and Holofernes—gouache on paper with sculptural blue blood dripping from painting and pooling on the floor, 6'x3'. Rhoads and Freedman, 2008. Balloones carry flaming WTC towers with banners: "BIANALE OR BUST" in reference to a Kurzen sculpture, page 23, and painting by Clara Hess.



In 2014 Roger Scruton began championing Classical Realism, by then called New Realism. In 2015 I managed to bring my Rape of Europa' (page 149) to his notice. Scruton took it for a Boucher, and condemned it as "kitsch and worse". Third wave modernists and contemporary artists rejected me as representational and classical, while the New Realists rejected me as Modernist. "Your painting," I was told, "is as sloppy as Renoir."

In 1989-90 The Idea was baffled for a time by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and it became harder to proudly exclude

non-collaborators. This was the advent of Postmodernism in art, which calmed doctrinaire aggression and cleared the ideologically stifling atmosphere of the '70s and '80s. It was no restoration, no 1815, but the

cries of "irrelevant" were less shrill, and the live-and-let-live ethic of the multiverse began to take hold. Validity could no longer be denied to representational painting, and only success determined status—by the measure of money—and anything might be promoted.

Nonetheless, my work, both too traditional and too modern, still met with hesitation, though not among those unspoiled by education and 'culture', who either don't care about art, or like whatever doesn't offend them. Thanks to these people I have been able to keep body and soul together. I am not ungrateful and, if I have a partisan



affiliation, it is with them. Living in France, I became a 'gilet jaune' and spent a year on the roundabouts painting their portraits (page 155).

The above to describe how I lived the period I am recounting in this chapter. Others, of course, must judge whether my claim to speak for those reactionaries I call "early modernists" is valid. They were the

painters of the 19th century — though their influence persisted well into the 20th — who first resisted pressure on painting from The Idea, and clung to, or sought to revive, an understanding of what painting is, and always had been, or "the tradition". I will discuss the tradition following this account of Contemporary Art, the New Art which emerged among the ruins of the third wave implosion.

Contemporary Art is of course not a style. It is a movement. I call its products Contemporary Art or the New Art. This movement has a father, Andy Warhol, and an adopted father, Marcel Duchamp. But it is so bewilderingly heterogeneous that it has even integrated those archtraditionalist and self-proclaimed reactionaries, the Classical Realists. The Classical Realists were sure they knew exactly what painting was even before they began. Three years of training, it turns out, is sufficient to achieve all they aim for — what the French call 'étude documentaire'. Under that name it is respectable. If a few conservative pundits (Roger Kimball and Roger Scruton) have deigned to take interest, the Classical Realists have nonetheless begged, and received, admittance to the Contemporary Art multiverse. Having accommodated New Realism, inflation of the bloated New Art establishment seems limitless.

Painting counts for nothing in our society. And yet it remains the foundation, or 'cultural' guarantee, of what is happening — of the New Art — for if the thing that is happening could only happen in the name of what it actually is, it would not happen. A simple thought experiment: without being able to brand it "art", what would the creators, fabricators, performers or selectors of the all too familiar and frequent pile-of-trash-in-the-pristine-gallery, call it and themselves?

It is undeniable, however, that something is indeed happening, something is being made, looked at, talked about and exchanged. Value of some kind is being added. Otherwise no one would bother.

In his story 'The Moon Moth', Jack Vance imagines a society without money. There is only something called "strakh". This untranslatable neologism is a word in a language that must be sung to the accompaniment of one of many small instruments. These require great persistence to master, and their mastery, like mastery of the intricate craftmanships and eruditions important to Sirenese society, determine 'strakh'. In Sirenese society a person's face is his greatest secret, and everyone is masked. The mask he wears depends also on "strakh".

"Here. Use this Moon Moth; it won't get you in trouble."

Thissell unenthusiastically inspected the mask. It was constructed of mouse-colored fur; there was a tuft of hair at each side of the mouthhole, a pair of feather-like antennae at the forehead. White lace flaps dangled beside the temples and under the eyes hung a series of red folds, creating an effect at once lugubrious and comic.

Thissell asked, "Does this mask signify any degree of prestige?" "Not a great deal."

"After all, I'm Consular Representative," said Thissell, "I represent the Home Planets, a hundred billion people—"

"If the Home Planets want their representative to wear a Sea Dragon Conqueror mask, they'd better send out a Sea Dragon Conqueror type of man."

"I see," said Thissell, in a subdued voice.

Elsewhere in the story Vance offers this discussion of 'strakh':

Prestige, face, 'mana', repute, glory: the Sirenese word is 'strakh'. Every man has his characteristic 'strakh', which determines whether, when he needs a houseboat, he will be urged to avail himself of a floating palace, rich with gems, alabaster lanterns, peacock faience and carved wood, or grudgingly permitted an abandoned shack on a raft. There is no medium of exchange on Sirene; the single and sole currency is 'strakh'.

To choose one's face is to be seen by others as what one chooses to be. On Sirene you can make that choice—if you can make it stick. In the metaverse anyone can choose the mask of artist—although that choice is almost obligatory—but making it stick does not depend on mastery of intricate crafts, as on Sirene. What is going on today in the name of art has to do with something like 'strakh'.

Representation in painting became shameful in the 1960s, an intellectual fault, an artistic crime. But were not Warhol's silk screens, Optical Realism, Hyper-Realism and Photo Realism — all art movements from the '60s — not representational? Although the word "representational" was used and vilified, and much representational work was indeed shunned, it was not representation as such that was banished. The problem was less pictures of things than the old way of seeing. That way was poetic — seeing the person in their face, seeing something mysterious in



all things. The Realisms, and Warhol's silk-screens, are photographic, reproductive, mechanical—things recorded not seen, optical facts not expression, technology not poetry.

The hot colors of Janet Fish (left), so popular in the late '60s, showing the distorting transparencies and reflections of curved glass, were at least not so dull and cold as Hyper

and Photo Realism. But her Optical Realism is about the singularity of visual experience. Its perspective is scientific, not human.

The escape from illustration into decoration, on a historical one-way ride, had been exhilarating. But the radicalized decorative aspect — Modernism's third wave — which banished representation and any semblance of meaning besides Rorschach test-like readings by critics turned armchair psychologist, rushed painting into a spectacular dead end. The changes had been wrung out of the illustrative and decorative aspects by History. Escape to a second or first wave orientation was now impossible, not because it couldn't happen but because it was forbidden. Pure abstraction destroyed painting at the same time as it destroyed itself. The last hurrah — the Pollocks, Rothkos, de Koonings, Newmans, Stills, Frankenthalers, huge canvases boldly covered in strong colors — were a crescendo from which there was nowhere to go. When the cheering died down the beast was dead. The New Art was not a development out of Modernism, it was a parasite on a corpse.

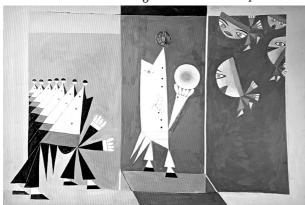
If second wave Modernism is academic Neoclassicism's evil twin—too decorative rather than too illustrative—the New Art is the anti-matter generated by the suicidal triumph of Abstract Expressionism's aspiration to pure form. It is art as pure content. To put this another way, the New Art is the illustrative aspect infinitely radicalized. The third wave aspired to pure form, the New Art aspires to pure content. This had never been tried. It is an emergent reality.

It may be objected that Pop Art does have form, be it only enlargements of Campbell's soup cans, or comic book image with Benday dots as big as grapes. These images are as low-resolution as possible but their message is loud and clear. They are not paintings, they are signs. As for Hyper and Photo Realism, what you see is all you get. If you have the Barbizon school in your eyes, the message of interior emptiness is evident — machine painting for the machine mind, the triumph of science over the heart, industrial product as art, machine processes as artistic.

A reflection of modern society? Perhaps. It also wallows in it, capitulates to it, worships it. Warhol perfected that worship. Industrial production, industrial glamor and industrial slaughter, sanitized with aesthetics and adored in his 'Brillo Boxes', 'Marilyn', and 'Electric Chair'.

The idea of Pop, however, had been around since the war, and even before. A 1946 print and painting by Kurzen, 'Nameless Man in His Nameless World' prefigured 'The Holy One', a "mirror painting" (below) of four years later, which satirizes worship of industrialized experience, the divine status of the atomized consumer, and sacralization of solipsistic alienation. The worshipers are a chorus of dancers from a Broadway show or Hollywood movie. The angels, or putti, are based on Kewpie dolls. Kewpie dolls are based on cartoons—they are industrial products based on industrial products. When a treasured childhood association is a Kewpie or Barbie doll, or a Disney film, industrial processes and marketing have integrated inner life.* The celebrant's head is a mirror. The Holy One is the viewer, ourselves—at least for fifteen minutes. It was inevitable that someone—it turned out to be Warhol—should take the step into unironic worship of the machine.

But there are even proto-pop elements in Cubism: newspapers as pictorial elements (page 79). The dashes that fill certain spaces in 'Guernica' (page 96) are also a trace of newspapers. Picasso used them, as collage, to test areas of light. The dashes reproduce the effect of type script.



'The Holy One', oil on board, with mirror, 75"x48", Aaron Kurzen, 1950

Inclusion of pictorial elements from industrial products is not yet Warhol, but it is the formal process of Pop: the substitution of industrial products for poetic expression.

^{* &#}x27;Fantasia' is one thing; 'Frozen' is another. There are degrees in this matter as in all others.

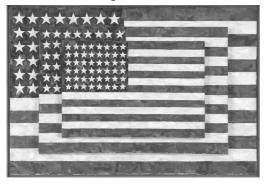


Like gas generated in a rotting carcass, causing it to swell and shift, Pop Art lent painting a zombie semblance of life, but very soon Conceptual Art proposed literal formlessness. Even Conceptual Art, however, must at least inform the audience of the concept. It resorted to notes and photos pinned to gallery walls. This was as close to pure and disembodied artas-concept as it was possible to go. The effort was short-lived.

A STOP sign is not a painting. You can hang it on a wall, look at it and discuss its aesthetic qualities but it is an industrial product not a poetic expression. Its

graphic properties are not poetry but a practical solution, cogs in the machine of a transportation system. Treating a STOP sign as poetry is worship of the industrial complex. Warhol's silk-screens are industrial products as worship of industrial products. Marilyn Monroe is an attractive woman but there are numberless women just as curvaceous and charming. Monroe's exceptional, even preeminent celebrity was not totally unrelated to qualities particular to her, but depended decisively on marketing and technology. Stardom is notoriously manufactured. Warhol's use of Marilyn is based on a worldwide operation by industrialists and financiers. Warhol worshipped their success.

Warhol's silk-screens are not forms, not poetic language. They are signs. Signs are not made to be looked at as art but content meant to be understood. It might be objected that Warhol's silk-screens are none-



theless visually engaging, even beautiful and interesting in their own way, but as much can be said for any sign, or any thing — spilled liquid, anything at all. Someone might prefer a STOP sign as a painting, but that is

a reflection on that person's preferences, not a metaphysical argument about the nature of art. There are people convinced they are Napoleon, or that the earth is flat. We call such people crazy or ignorant or stupid. There are legitimate differences of taste, but seeing things for what they are is not a matter of taste. Preferring a flat thing with marks or colors that is not a painting to an actual painting might have all sorts of reasons. Such preference is not at issue. There are many flat things with images or colors on them: eye charts, rugs, maps, industrial drawings of machine parts, place mats, dollar bills, game boards, advertising flyers. But when it is maintained that something of this kind, for example a reproduction of the American flag in paint, is the same kind of thing as a Corot, we are no longer dealing with a legitimate difference of opinion but the stance of appreciation.

Pop Art is industrial by-product. Let us accept this as artistically legitimate. Let us even stipulate that art is art by virtue of its contemporary relevance. Why, even so, should the industrial part of experience be taken for the whole? Does the sun not still rise? Is there no longer any non-technological part of life? Abortion, pornography and retirement homes exist. But birth, love and death exist as well! Baudelaire, Fuseli, Goya, Bosch—it is not as if the old art was blind to the ugly aspects of life. Is there a place in the New Art for beauty and poetry, even in the desolate chaos of the triumphant Idea? In the mid-'70s Jasper Johns, who painted the American flag (opposite), was widely hailed as the greatest living painter.* Today he is as forgotten as those other greatest painters of their day: Picot, Cabanel or Bonnat. Whatever we may think of Abstract Expressionism, that swan song of true painting, it is not yet forgotten. Like dada-shock after the war, Pop Art could happen as art in

the '60s with some justification.

Oriented by Pop Art, the New Art is aware of what it is. Reacting to Warhol's Happenings, Marcel Duchamp quipped that "art had finally been made out of boredom". It is now Duchamp, not Warhol, who is the pope of Contemporary Art. More elegant and respectable than Warhol, Duchamp is certainly more pre-

^{*} e.g. Newsweek: Oct. 10, 1977

^{&#}x27;Protect from Freezing' - Valentine for Saja - paint can lids, Aaron Kurzen, circa 1956

sentable. But, in his slovenly and degenerate way, Warhol was a visionary genius and the true father of the New Art. With Warhols' transformation of painting into signage, of beauty into aesthetics, of form into content, the New Art became transcendent as the emergent reality. By swapping Warhol out for Duchamp the contemporary artist achieves the status of god-like creator.

Marcel Duchamp began, with the rest of his generation, as a Post-Impressionist. But personal experience radicalized him even prior to World War I. After the 'Nude Descending a Staircase' had been hung in the 'Salon des Independents' of 1911, it was rejected and carried out of the show by his own brother and other members of their Cubist group.* Modern art thus revealed itself as narrower, more doctrinaire and self-aggrandizing than the already irrelevant academy had ever been. This dramatic gesture of ideologically motivated exclusion,† inflicted by his fellow artists, was part of what motivated Duchamp when, with his friends—for it was a collective effort—they submitted a urinal, entitled 'Fountain'—signed "R. Mutt", the urinal manufacturer—to the 1917 Society of Independent Artists, in New York, a show which included many of the French Cubists. It was the sort of scandal the dadaists were eagerly provoking whenever and wherever they could.

Having moved from Cezanne to Cubism, Duchamp went on to what he hoped would be an "inhuman, dry, non-optical art", which began with the 'Coffee Grinder' and developed into the 'Large Glass'. This non-optical art can show or represent things but the showing is about thinking. As for "found-objects", they are almost always manufactured things, like the coffee grinder. Duchamp used industrial productions but he did not worship them. He was after something new and personal, which he sometimes called "non-art".

Even into the 1950s, the art world was extremely small. Almost everybody knew almost everybody else. Even internationally known artists were part of that community in a way unimaginable now, and the differences between Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, Surrealists, Cubists and even academic hold-outs, was a family affair. There were few galleries, and if the occasional painter did get rich and famous (on a scale the smallness of which would count for nothing today, with the possible

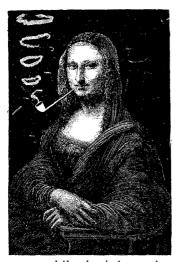
^{*} This group called itself the 'Section d'or'—"The Golden Section"—to link themselves to the old Masters. The Golden Section is a ratio — A+B is to A as A is to B — sometimes used in painting; it also defines forms found in nature, like the spiral of a snail shell.

[†] Duchamp's painting was accused of being Futurist. Futurism is Cubism under the influence of a competing but popular form of The Idea.

exception of Picasso), those who made the sacrifices to become painters were not motivated by money or fame.

By the early 20th century the old Neoclassical academy was mostly converted to Post-Impressionism. Meanwhile Western civilization, perched proudly on its most modern and progressive accomplishment science and technology — suddenly shamed itself in the unexpectedly squalid horror of the First World War (1914-1918), dadaist and Surrealists were motivated, by disappointment and disgust, to try something else. Surrealism, which began looking to dreams and political theory, quickly became notorious for doctrinaire authoritarianism. Surrealist ferment affected some art work then being done, and however fecund that may have been in certain ways, its basis—a mix of rebellion, psychology, desire for newness and social progress — was non-artistic. And however we should understand the absurdest shenanigans of the dadaists, it lasted only a few years. Tristan Tzara, one of dada's founders, said that dada was "an adolescent reaction to the war", and both he and Duchamp later said "shock is over". These dadaists cannot be accused of being kill-joys who would deny their own youthful fun to others, because there are jokes and mischiefs which may be amusing or useful once but can never be repeated in a meaningful way, until they are utterly forgotten and their context somehow comes into being a second time.

'Fountain' may be art, but the gesture of proposing a stunningly inappropriate object as art, is not itself art. And that gesture, once made, cannot be meaningfully repeated or surpassed. Yet it is copied without end. Hirst's dead shark, for example, comes off as self-promotional, calculated and fatuous, a sordid attempt to out-do Duchamp, to shock. In 1917, in the midst of the war, at a time when the art world was still rooted in painting tradition — but exploring new ways everyone found exciting, while also becoming more and more politicized and ideological—the moment was opportune. With 'Fountain', Duchamp and his friends thumbed their noses at the academic imposture of the Cubists, and pointed to grace and beauty that might be found in unexpected places (the curves of an industrial casting, like da Vinci's cracks in the walls) while making a roguish 'double entendre', because the fountain in question cannot be the urinal. If R. Mutt had presented a bidet, it could have been a fountain, but a urinal is not a fountain. 'Fountain', is a urinal, a vessel for the reception of urine; it may be "a" or "the" work of art, or it may point to an actual fountain,



which might be the art. Urination—or its instrument—as a found-object, as art, would seem to steal Manzoni's thunder, who would thereby be 47 years out of date. Unless the escalation to public defecation—by an unremembered innovator*—can be considered artistically relevant. The smell, at least, was no longer metaphorical.

Does it matter whether Duchamp's tricks and word play are art? They certainly add something to life which is thought-provoking and amusing. The dadaists were not violent anarchists, but they were energetic mischief makers and theoretical pyromani-

acs, while also being serious about art. 'Fountain' may have been shocking—to pearl-clutching prudes—but it was not destructive. Long before Duchamp, groups like the Fumists (mystifiers) and Incohérents, produced images like the Mona Lisa smoking a pipe. Thumbing one's nose at authority was no 20th century innovation. Duchamp's love of the absurd and puns has a long history in France.

The 'Nude Descending a Staircase' is now recognized as a masterpiece. Duchamp, not Villon, Gleizes, Metzinger and the other minor Cubists who mistreated him, was the important artist. Vengeance? Every aspect of Duchamp's conduct throughout his life shows him to be the opposite of a publicity seeker, of someone bitter and argumentative. He was exceptionally private and secretive, and profoundly and very personally devoted to art. It is hard to imagine him motivated by vengeance. Still, the exclusion of his painting by inferior artists, in the context of an allegedly liberal and experimental time, is a tension—like the exclusion and insult inflicted on representational painters which began in the 1960s.

Because there are no longer any standards, however foolish (e.g. "Futurism bad") by which paintings can be compared—excepting money success—the insult and injury I have been privileged to receive has a certain character. The Cubist academy sought to exclude what it saw as fascism in the 'Nude Descending a Staircase'. Duchamp himself was not targeted. His fellow painters neither destroyed his work nor broke off

^{*} I cannot find a record of it, but I remember the scandal—enjoyed by all—of an artist defecating on a Greenwich Village gallery floor, as art, at the opening of his show. My father was among those present. This would have been in the early 1960s. Such tricks were frequent at the time.

relations with him. My case has been the opposite. It has never really been my work which made me a freak and a target, but something about myself: my orientation. My work was occasionally vandalized, but more often I was personally insulted. But insults are a sort of engagement, a sort of recognition. Mostly, however, I was ignored. My orientation exasperated the situation, but I was by no means alone in being ignored. In the multiverse of the New Art, where each person generates their own world of creation, there is nothing for artists to talk to each other about. Being ignored and ignoring is how it is for almost everyone.

If I was never inspired to vengeance, I did play some tricks. They were not influenced by Duchamp. I was too interested in Fragonard and Tintoretto to bother with dada. My most extravagant trick concerned a jury show, at the Boston Museum School in 1977, with the theme: "Series, Systems and Symbols". I submitted the only piece that took account of this silly and non-artistic theme—themed shows were becoming popular, a logical development when content is the only thing that counts. I took 3 of my drawings—loose copies of figures from 18th century religious paintings in the Fogg museum—and made Xerox copies of each, using different settings. At that time photocopying was in its infancy, and the results were interestingly aesthetic. They were to be pinned to the



wall with black and white headed pins, and I made a fuss about which pins went where, according to an order I had determined, to the annoyance of my fellow students hanging the show. It was amusing they did not take my pinning system seriously — humor lost on everyone but myself.

The title of the piece was 'Series of Systematically Transfigured, Stylistically Systematic Rococo Symbols' (page 101). I then revived the school newspaper, for which I wrote a long article about the show, including remarks about my own piece. All this produced only two reactions. An older teacher warned a group of sullen students that they ought to take the article into consideration. The other was an encounter in the gallery with a young and popular drawing teacher. I did not study with him - I studied drawing with Clarence Washington, who was usually drunk and only ever had two or three students in his class, but whom I found inspiring. This teacher's submission to the show was a "drawing" consisting of a tangle of neon tubes emerging from a box of sand. I didn't see what that had to do with series, systems and symbols, but he understood the irony of what I had done — the title left little room for doubt — but argued that it made no difference, that my piece had a life of its own. In spite of myself I had successfully and properly done something relevant. This was a negation of my intention, a species of appropriation, a sort of pyrrhic victory over my lampoon of the inconsequential foolishness of the show.

This 1970s experience, typical of the solipsistic indifference of almost everyone for everything but themselves and their own work, is very different from the close-knit relationships and passionately shared concerns of young artists in the 1910s. But I think Duchamp's feelings and motivations must have been similar to mine. What did such ideological nonsense and power-games have to do with him? All one might try to do is shake people up a bit.

My piece was certainly more "original", "valid" and respectful of the show's theme than anything my fellow students had done (one submission was a painting of twelve eggs in their carton, presumably a series). If I had been sincere about Contemporary Art, I could have made a way for myself in that milieu. My fellow students were all new to art, where I already had a small lifetime of exposure and experience thanks to my childhood circumstances. The training I had received from Kurzen and Mercedes Matter gave me a real drawing foundation (though not

in my own eyes). But drawing no longer mattered. Except for Kurzen and Clarence Washington, drawing in any real sense was hardly being taught—in that school or anywhere else. My concerns were out of date. In any case I was uninterested in the flaccid society of 1970s art students, lost in their assiduous efforts to achieve the only thing that mattered: success through originality.

My piece was superior as Contemporary Art, as Duchamp's 'Nude' was superior Cubism compared to Gleizes and Metzinger, but my gesture corresponds to 'Fountain' only because it was ironic, a prank, a protest. But where the urinal was a shock, an insulting contrast to what everyone thought they ought to be doing, my piece was the opposite; it was about incarnating the New Art, about outdoing them at their own game — which most of them were not even bothering to play — and thereby revealing its nature. Response to the urinal was loud indignation. Response to my prank was silent indifference. Furthermore, where Duchamp's urinal has a serious artistic aspect — formally it is quite stylish — I was deliberately making something foolish, something aesthetic, out of something I thought was beautiful. It was a rear guard action, a protest against the disappearance of drawing, traditional goals and standards into a fog of concept and industrially produced aesthetics - though I could not have stated that so clearly at the time. Tristan Tzara and Duchamp were right: shock was over. For dada context is everything.

Duchamp claimed to have abandoned art long before his death. In 1966, however, 'Etant donnés', a final and posthumous trick, was revealed to the world. Its retrograde poetic sensuality—like the presciently Postmodern 'Series of Systematically Transfigured, Stylistically Systematic Rococo Symbols' of 1976—failed to shock. 'Etant donnés' did nothing to blunt Contemporary Art's worship of industrial products. The "givens" are out of what beauty arises, but who cares now?

Duchamp was a Post-Impressionist, a Cubist, maybe a Futurist, one of the founders of dada, and a Surrealist. But the 'Large Glass', and 'Etant donnés', are not dada. Duchamp was not a joiner. He preferred to do things on his own, to not repeat himself. Much goes on in the name of dada, and under the aegis of Duchamp, that might be assessed for what it actually is rather than how it is branded. dada may be the ultimate antiestablishment thing, but it happened in a certain context and for a certain, very brief, time.



Anti-establishment attitudes are an odd foundation for an establishment, and yet the New Art — now six decades old, international in scope, sweeping up in its trillion dollar wake more artists than have died in all history — is an establishment based on rejection of establishment. It was bobo (bourgeois bohemian) before boboism — anti-establishment and pro-establishment. One might say it is a new thing which has established itself. But if this is so, why does it clutch at the mantle of the old masters while boasting of having rendered those antediluvian gentlemen irrelevant? By defining itself as an evolution, a continuation of art, it has managed to both reject the old as irrelevant, and to appropriate its prestige. A pretty trick which Saul Steinberg saw through in the 1960s.

Is Duchamp the right poster boy, the legitimate pope of the academy of the avant-guard? The Ready-mades are the justification and theoretical foundation of the major premise of the New Art: each person's right to be an artist and, as such, to designate whatever they care to fabricate or present, as art. Duchamp's Ready-mades, however, as he himself explains, were a game he played with himself, a private activity, a search for "things which were neither beautiful nor ugly", for "non-art". The Ready-mades are the opposite of art. They are like buoys marking the limits of the deep channel of beauty where art ends and the shoals of non-art and indifference begin. There are only thirteen of them. They were discovered over the course of many years. Duchamp did not make them public for twenty-six years. When he was challenged about their status as art, he famously replied, "They are art because I say so". Challenged about his authority to say such a thing, he replied he could "Be-

cause I am an artist". Challenged about his status as artist, he replied, "I am an artist because I say I am an artist".

Now, it is one thing for Marcel Duchamp, at the time and in the circumstances, to say these things about his work and himself. It is quite another for others to repeat them unironically to justify themselves and their doings.

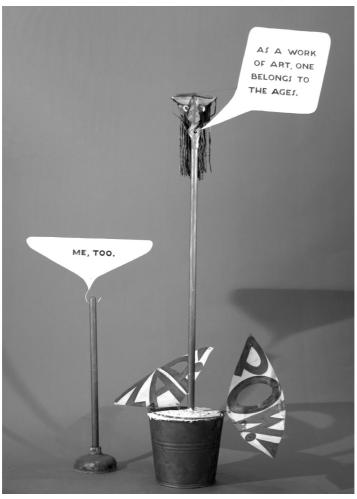
This is no case of conflicting reports about who said what, and how they said it. Duchamp made these statements in an easily accessible filmed interview. One must know nothing about the history of art, and nothing about Duchamp, to miss the irony. Duchamp the dadaist, Duchamp the explorer, experimenter, man of privacy and patience, needed and wanted neither branding of himself, nor of anything he did,



to be interested in doing it. The interviewer's concern about what is and is not art is silly, and Duchamp's ironic reactions are kindly, if arch. He indulges the questioner while doing something amusing. If he had known what people would do with it, he may have been more careful. Indeed, he later tried to undo the damage.

Less sense of irony is needed to understand 'raseé' (shaved) than his famous quips. But 'raseé' was not understood, and is still ignored. At an opening of Robert Rauschenberg's Neo-Dadaist work in the 1960s — Aaron Kurzen was present — Duchamp came prepared with 'raseé', and passed it out among the celebrants. A modification of his famous 'L.H.O.O.Q.' (She Has A Hot Ass), this time it was Mona Lisa without a mustache. Drawing that mustache had been an adolescent gesture, if quite traditional in the French 19th century context of his

youth. 'L.H.O.O.Q.' was also only a tiny mark on a postcard. Its hyper-fame can make us forget these things. In 'raseé' that small gesture is undone. But those for whom Duchamp made it failed to understand, or refused to heed. If Duchamp is the pope of Contemporary Art he is a pope without 'ex cathedra' authority. The message of 'raseé', delicate, subtle and self-deprecating, is an idiom, the Duchampian idiom, inaudible to such people.



'Mop Man and Plunger', Aaron Kurzen, circa 1965: mop, plunger, bucket, plaster, wire, paper, paint.

'L.H.O.O.Q.' mocks lifeless traditionalism and illegitimate authority, but Leonardo's masterpiece was not the lifeless traditionalism and illegitimate authority being mocked. Duchamp's target was the 19th century academicism which idolized the Mona Lisa but did not understand it, and used it as a whip to herd and humiliate, and as a front to promote itself and its crippled conception of art. Duchamp did not want to practice optical art as he called it, by which he meant Neoclassicism and Impressionism, but also Cezanne, Fauvism and even Cubism. Cubism may not be representative in the usual sense, but for Duchamp it is optical because it is only for being seen: it does not embody thought. He did not regard religious painting of the 13th to the 18th century as optical, but as filled with intellect.

There is more to art than painting. Da Vinci was a musician, an engineer, an inventor. Duchamp saw chess, word-play and other things, as, for

himself, artistic activities most of which he practiced privately. The Neo-Dadaists draped themselves in the mantle of Duchamp's prestige to legitimate their own doings. They made Duchamp their model and idol—their da Vinci—their broom to sweep away traditional work and make room for themselves. They were phonies, marketers, or as Kurzen said, "operators".

That Duchamp was convinced, by friends who knew the value of a dollar, to produce the Ready-mades in signed series, and sell them as art, is the commercial logic used to argue that they are indeed art. That it might have been useful for Duchamp to parlay his unsought celebrity into a bit of money is ignored, like the irony of his comments about it. But ignoring such things is not obligatory. The question is not: are the Ready-mades art? The question is: do they justify that which they are proclaimed to justify? The Ready-mades are to the New Art what the 'Mona Lisa' was to the worst kind of 19th century Neoclassi-

cal academicism. A new Duchamp—and the world-wide horde of self-proclaimed artists all pretend to be exactly that—would draw a mustache on the Ready-mades, not use them to justify themselves.

Aaron Kurzen drew that mustache. One of the thirteen Ready-mades is a shovel. Duchamp called it 'In Advance of a Broken Arm'. Kurzen does not call 'Mop Man and Plunger' a Ready-made, or a found-object—though the mop and other elements are, if not found-objects certainly industrial products—he calls it "assemblage". It is not the mop or the plunger that becomes art, it is the assembly of these elements that is 'assemblage'. Is assemblage art? Does it matter? 'Mop Man and Plunger', whatever it may be, is pertinent and funny. Duchamp said Warhol "made art out of boredom". Kurzen made something with wit that is social critique and does not need to be labeled "art" in order to be meaningful, understood and delectable.

'L.H.O.O.Q.' does not denigrate da Vinci. It mocks the tiresome self-importance of the culture establishment, whether it calls itself "Modernist" or not. It does not dishonor the painting itself, it is merely a small mark and five letters on one postcard of the billions that have been printed. As for Mona Lisa, she probably did have a hot ass. Almost all women do. She might even have had some hair on her upper lip, as many women do. Da Vinci himself was hot—he was famously the most beautiful man of his time. It takes nothing away from da Vinci's wonderful genius, or the beauty of the Mona Lisa, to remember that they, like the rest of us, were people, not icons, not gods. Duchamp is not tearing them down, but keeping them where they belong: close to us.

Though a mop is a kind of shovel, and though Duchamp's piece is revered as a foundational masterpiece of the emergent reality, and though Kurzen flips the implement on its head, 'Mop Man and Plunger' does not denigrate Duchamp any more than Duchamp denigrates da Vinci. 'Mop Man and Plunger', if more explicitly and hilariously, mocks the tiresome and ridiculous pretension and self-importance of the anti-culture-culture establishment.

What, then, is the message of Marcel Duchamp? That everything is art and that everyone — by auto-designation — is an artist? What need, in that case, of artists? To indicate stuff and designate it "art"? If so, why wait? I — or anyone else — can take care of that on the instant. Here are the magic words, we can recite them in chorus:

I HEREBY DECLARE MYSELF ARTIST

and

THEREBY DESIGNATE

the

TOTALITY of EVERYTHING

to

BE ART

There! everything is now art. Artists, by consequence, are no longer wanted. There is nothing left for them to do. In spite of the huffing and puffing of the culture machine, artists have conspired in an unconscious, unintended and collective disappearing act. They are gone with the art.

Duchamp's oeuvre is notably sparse, and often numbingly deliberate and painstaking. The endless calculations and complexities he imposed on himself for the 'Large Glass' were finally too much, even for his patient and painstaking nature, and he abandoned the effort. As for the Ready-mades, those thirteen markers on the boundary of beauty, they took him many careful years to discover. 'Etant donnés' also involved dedicated perfectionism. It took years of secret work to accomplish. And the result: a nude holding a lantern in a landscape — with reference to a Courbet from 1866 dealing with origins. Could a call to poetry, an appeal to beauty, and a guiding light to art be clearer?

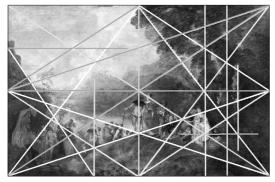
And it is in the name of this man that anybody is an artist, and whatever they do must be treated as art.



'In the Shadow of Lucifer', Aaron Kurzen, circa 1991, hologram in assemblage

COMPOSITION

If I had learned anything from my teachers, it was that the most important aspect of painting was composition. I thought I had some idea of what that meant. It had to do with how a painting is arranged, how the different elements — figures, forms, shapes, colors — go together. The principles of their arrangement are often said to be such things as balance and harmony. Geometry is also supposed to be involved. But when it came right



down to it, I eventually had to admit I had no idea how any of this translated into specific configurations that were more compositionally significant than others.

In this diagram, which pretends to suggest something about the geometrical scheme underlying Watteau's 'Embarkation for

Cythera', certain lines seem to correspond to certain elements, but never very clearly. How does it reveal anything useful? But even if it does, the magic of painting cannot reside in how things line up along verticals, horizontals, diagonals or regular curves, and the idea that a painting is a masterpiece because it does, or, by extension, that it would be better if it corresponded to them more closely, seems absurd. As for "harmony", what does it mean in practice? What constitutes a harmony of forms or colors? That they be similar? The more alike, the more homogeneous, the better? Or "balance", what does it mean in practice? As soon as one tries to give concrete answers to such questions they become ridiculous. What about dissonance and imbalance, are they anti-compositional, and even: what are they, when it comes to actual painting, to the disposition of form and color?

Blue and orange are opposite colors. At one time, I painted with only those two colors. Was the result harmonious or the opposite? I liked it, but what of that? My father used to say that all colors go with all colors, and I have never been able to see how that is wrong. It's not as if there are

color combinations one never finds in good painting. Titian, on the other hand, said: "the only colors a painter needs are black, white and red". But those colors being the only ones we need, does not yet tell us what to do with them. Eventually, however, I did manage to learn what Titian meant, and that it does indeed explain what a painter should do with color — but that was years later.

That I had no idea what I was doing, no practical guiding principles when I tried to compose pictures, determined me to discover what composition was truly about. A starting point was something I learned from Kurzen in the life class, where we were to "fill the page with the figure". Simply filling the page was already compositional. Composition had something to do with the whole page or canvas, or the relation of the subject to the page. A portrait, a bouquet, simply filling the page tastefully — not too much or too little — is the formal arrangement of a vast number of paintings. But even the simplest painting, to say nothing of a multi-figure composition or complex landscape, is still composed of an uncountable number of elements and aspects. And even assuming placing the subject tastefully exhausts part of the question, there is still color. If simply making a convincing illusion were enough, the solution to the color problem would be that color should be used to give a realistic impression of the subject, and there are indeed color tricks to that end.

Prior to the emergence of Classical Realism, Kurzen often warned me that my paintings were too illustrative, that I was not paying enough attention to composition. His perspective, I now understand, was strongly influenced by his second wave education and orientation, where great emphasis was put on the decorative or flat aspect of painting. It was only after the emergence of Classical Realism — which claimed to be rational, and reduced painting to illusion, and looked to Neoclassical academics (Bouguereau, Leighton, Cabanel) as their ideal, preferring them even to the 16th and 17th century masters the Neoclassics themselves idolized — that I began to understand how my own orientation was what I now call "first wave", or "traditional" in the sense of the word as used by those reactionaries, the early modernists. I gave more importance to illusion than my teachers, and more importance to the decorative aspect than the Classical Realists.

As Renoir once put himself through an "Ingres phase" as part of his self-education, in 1981 I put myself through a Cubist, or second wave

phase (below). But the 1970s and '80s were not the 1840s and '50s. If Neoclassical academics dominated painting in their time, there were a few genuinely traditional painters — Corot and Delacroix in particular — to whom young painters could look. In the late 20th century, Neoclas-



sical academicism was long gone, except for its black legend. Post-Impressionism itself had collapsed at mid-century, and by the 1980s even Abstract Expressionism, as then practiced by people without a Hofmannesque education, had become a travesty of itself, and Pop Art had already morphed into Contemporary Art. Except for a few isolated and elderly painters, still involved with the Expressionism, Surrealism, and even traditional painting of their youth, and of whom one never heard without knowing them personally, the domination of the New Art was

absolute. My adventure into Cubism — or, more exactly, my plunge into a second wave approach — plus the advent of Classical Realism, helped to clarify my own orientation.

The thrust of the early modernist analysis was to correct the over-emphasis on illusion of the academics, which eventually led to over-emphasis in the opposite direction—on the decorative aspect, on painting understood primarily as colors and lines arranged in a certain order, as Maurice Denis had said. This was Post-Impressionism or the second wave.

If Expressionism—the final manner of Post-Impressionism—was familiar and admirable in my eyes, I wanted something else, something I nonetheless first saw in Expressionism as a child, then in Impressionism, then as a teenager in Watteau, and very soon in the old masters generally. My orientation had nothing to do with Pop Art, and even if I had the benefit of many teachers who had become artists before the war, who had lived in the ferment of that heroic time animated by an historically pioneering spirit, I was 30 or 40 years younger, living in another

world where that spirit, except for the by then obviously problematic emphasis on originality, was alien. I could easily have become a Classical Realist, I did not admire Bouguereau more than Tintoretto, but prior to Classical Realism's emergence, I had not understood how profoundly different they were. I did not grasp the problematic aspect of illusion. The advent of the Classical Realists helped me see why Kurzen



often warned me that my orientation was too illustrative.

My favorite painter was Fragonard. It was easy to see his relation to Post-Impressionism and Expressionism. His brush had all the energy and verve of Picasso, his colors all the simplicity of Cubism, and yet the illusory, the illustrative aspect of this work suffered nothing in my eyes, even compared to Rembrandt himself. I copied and emulated him as best I could, but as a teacher of composition Fragonard remained mysterious for me. The painters who opened my eyes were unexpected.

The first was Canaletto. His paintings being exclusively of recognizable views of Venice, that eminently picturesque city, one might think he need do no more, compositionally, than choose a favorable vantage and record what was before his eyes. I eventually learned that there was a great deal more to Canaletto than that, and was even able to trace his journey of compositional discovery, starting with his early struggles to record what he saw. I had already been made aware by Kurzen that the great diagonals of a canvas, which run from corner to corner, are

important as the longest possible straight line on the rectangle. I had even made a painting, under his direction, of a man fighting a lion, in which the man, nearer to us, and lion, farther away, faced each other along a great



diagonal. A diagonal emerges in this case because, for the lion to be farther away it must be higher on the page. It is a principle of perspective: man and lion are near and far elements, points defining a line which, expressing their spatial relationship define a diagonal. But it was only when straining to extract compositional secrets from paintings at the Met, that a Canaletto told me what I should already have learned from that lion painting. If a great diagonal, or any diagonal, traced on the surface of a page is limited, extended into the space it can be lengthened indefinitely. That Canaletto capriccio illustrated this more explicitly than my lion painting. A diagonal made of architecture, clouds and other elements, defined a line of apparently infinite

extent thrusting into the painting and disappearing into the atmospheric distance. This was my first insight into how the decorative aspect and illustrative aspect work together—a secret of "true painting".

At the time I had not yet discovered these terms. Warning me about being too illustrative, on a few occasions Kurzen had used the word "decorative" interchangeably with "abstract". That had intrigued me. About ten years later I read Arthur Dow (1857-1922) an American artist and educator of the same generation as Van Gogh and Seurat. Dow had studied in Paris in the 1880s, and his books are a trace of what I call the "early modernist analysis", according to which the decorative aspect and the illustrative aspect, working together properly, result in true painting. I learned these terms from Dow. But the secret Canaletto helped me discover — painfully obvious once you are aware of it, once you say it to yourself — is that a line on the surface is also a line in space. Less obvious are the practical implications for composition, and it was years before I managed to make them effective.

Even later I read Hogarth's 1810 treatise 'The Analysis of Beauty' where he discusses his famous serpentine line of beauty. The serpentine line is not simply a graceful arabesque, but a line that curls volumetrically, like a twisting horn. Hofmann's "push and pull" is a crude, even brutal, version of the same idea. Both point to how any mark is simultaneously decorative and illustrative, or on-the-surface and spatial.

Dow, a partisan of the second wave attitude towards Neoclassicism,

complains about illustrative painting, or over-emphasis on illusion and optical effects. Had he lived to see pure abstraction, he might have pointed out that it failed to be true painting for the opposite reason — over-emphasis on the decorative aspect. In true painting the two aspects function together such that the result can be suggested by the formula: 1+1=3.

I made a second discovery, this time thanks to Boucher. Ever since the Boucher show at the Metropolitan museum in 1986 — which I visited every single day of its run — Boucher has had a certain popularity. Previously, however, he interested no one, and was even looked down upon as saccharine and frivolous. But I had long been an enthusiast, and it seemed strange to me that abstract painters and Expressionists, who prided themselves



on their disinterest in representation, were blind to Boucher's decorative strength. What blinded them, strangely, was what Boucher illustrated, but what difference did that make, why should that matter to them? A painting by Boucher is always a fascinatingly elaborate and satisfyingly solid construction, and he became my great teacher of composition.

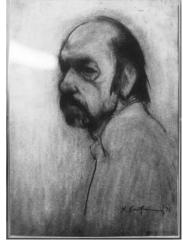
With Boucher it is even possible to start understanding painting in terms of geometry, though it is by no means obligatory or necessary. For example, in this painting of Venus teasing Cupid, there is a straight line extending from the foot of principal figure (Venus) up along her body, past Cupid's head, along the reclining body of a putto, thrusting back into

space to terminate along the arm of another putto. Other such lines may easily be traced. What is significant about these lines is that the forms which define them tilt into the space. They are lines (really relations between forms suggesting lines) which lie across the canvass but also extend into it. Canaletto had already opened my eyes to that aspect — what I learned from Boucher was how this related to color. Before this can be explained color must be understood from a painter's point of view.

A painter must have a certain understanding of color, and many painters have it quite naturally. I am not among them, which obliged me to work my way into that understanding, which has the single advantage of having prepared me to discuss it. We naturally think of colors in terms of hues. When color is mentioned we think red, blue, yellow — primary colors — and secondary colors like green, which is a mixture of blue

and yellow, etc. That is not how a painter should think about color. I was given my first great insight into the matter by Herbert Katzman (this page, self portrait) when he mentioned that drawing was just as much about color as painting. I understood what he meant when I began to analyze color by its fundamental properties, of which there are four:

VALUE (how light or dark)
TEMPERATURE (how warm or cool)
INTENSITY (how pure or dull)
HUE (purple, orange, etc.)



These properties, however, are not equal—value is by far the most important. When the light is dim we can still see, even though color is drained away. Black and white photographs are perfectly legible.* Even if colors are changed arbitrarily we rarely fail to understand what we are seeing. Dark and light are sufficient to explain almost everything. For this reason, and from the point of view of understanding our visual experience, hue is the least important part of color. If this seems odd it is only because of vocabulary; we associate the word color with hue.

^{*} Photography was not needed to discover this. In 1810 Hogarth wrote: "Even prints, by means of lights and shades, will perfectly inform the eye of every shape and distance whatsoever..."

Kurzen taught this lesson, and others, with his 'Imaginary Portrait exercise', for which he would give a demonstration. Calling for a color, he would fill the lower third of a page. Calling for another he filled the upper part. Then, after requesting an age and sex, he would bring the lower color, whatever it was, into the upper part, to form the head. He would then call for colors for hair and clothes, and finish the portrait. Of course the colors proposed were as outlandish as possible but, whatever they might be, the painting always came out well. The lesson is not that color choices are not meaningful but that, when you speak in the language of painting, hues can be used with more freedom than we imagine, and though a delightful part of painting, when it comes to representation are not as important as we tend to think. Their importance lies elsewhere.

Making paintings look realistic, the illusion of flesh for example, is not achieved by somehow copying the color of someone's skin. What

we see has no one-to-one correspondence with anything on our pallet, or anything that can be done with brush, fingers or pigments. Pigments are like words with which to talk about what we see, and what we see is a complex, multi-layered and changing thing. Our eyes, adjusted to bright light, see shadows as murky. When we peer into the shadows our irises open and we discover colors previously invisible, while what is well lit, and previously clear, is now washed out and colorless in the glare. Meanwhile, we, the light, and everything else, is constantly moving.



Furthermore, the closer we look at anything the more we discover—an infinity of detail. We can also look at things very generally, but then no particular thing is distinct. Visual experience, to say nothing of emotional reactions to whatever we look at, is not an object susceptible of translation into an exactly corresponding image. It is literally an experience. Colors are arranged on a canvas the way the words of a poem are arranged in verses, in order to speak about experience.

Intensity and temperature are also more important than hue. If a bright

yellow replaces a bright red, or a dull green replaces gray, the temperature and intensity do not change. The feel of the color in a painting depends principally on the dosage of light and dark, pure and dull, warm and cool. Now we can begin to understand Titian's remark about needing only black, white and red. Black and white are the lightest and darkest colors. They provide the full range of values, which is the most important thing. Red gives us intensity and warmth, while black and white mixed (gray) is cool across the whole range of values. This, Titian is telling us, is what is fudamental about color in painting.

Other formulas than black-white-red can give us a fair range of value and temperature. Purple-yellow for example. Yellow is light and warm, while purple is dark and cool. The value of red is intermediary, not very light like yellow, so red is a better choice, if only one hue can be had, because of the importance of the middle range of values.

Orange-blue is another solution. Orange is light and warm, while blue is dark and cool. The many paintings I did with only orange and blue should have taught me this lesson. The formulas blue-green and greenpurple, however, are very limiting because these colors are darkish and cooler, so that we lose warmth and the upper range of values.

Katzman's remark, then, means that whatever one uses to draw, be it charcoal or sanguine, and whatever you draw on, be it white, buff or gray paper, color is there. However limited the means, the possibilities are still immense and probably infinite.

What, then, did I learn from Boucher?

In composition lines do three things simultaneously: lie on the surface, plunge into space, and define forms. Color involves areas, patches and

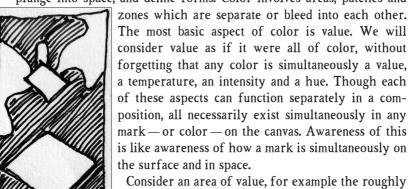




figure 3

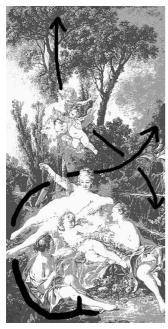
diamond shape of light defined by the four figures in the lower part of the Boucher. This shape, in itself, is made up of forms which have spatial relations among them. But as an area of light it is a diamond shape on the surface — which also tilts in space, like the diagonal line already discussed. It is one thing on the surface and another as something in space. It is both things separately and simultaneously.

Now consider all the light areas of the Boucher which, very roughly, are three: the group of figures at the bottom, the two flying putti with a dove in front of the tree, and the sky behind the tree. Figure 3 is a schematic representation of this structure. However, because of how figure 3 is constructed, while the smaller diamond is clearly in front of the dark area, the lower diamond can seem to be a hole in the dark shape,



such that all the light areas, except the smaller diamond, are one contiguous form in the background. Seen this way, figure 3 has three elements: the light background which is farthest back, the dark shape in front of it, and the small diamond pushing (or pulling) foremost.

Boucher's actual painting does not function quite this way. In addition to the lower diamond coming frankly forward, there are areas of intermediate value. Figure 3 ignores those, but in the painting they spill around, among and through the lighter and darker areas. However, even though the lower diamond area, made of the four major figures, is not a hole in the dark area, but pushes forward, it is nonetheless linked with the light sky areas behind the trees because, on the surface, they are part of what I call, in my private jargon, a "unity" of light values. In the same manner there are unities of dark values, and of intermediate values. This is an over-simplification — the painting has more than



three values, and their flows and fluctuations could never be reduced to any number. But, roughly speaking, for the sake of argument, to help us understand how painting functions, we can look at it that way — the way a Post-Impressionist like Gauguin might have done. The version of the Boucher on page 119 is reduced to three values; there we can see how the unity of light deploys over certain areas, some of which are near, some far. Deepest in the space is the light area of the sky. This is comparable to Hofmann's composition on page 86, where the light area in the upper right seems further back.

The middle value unity — the gray — can be considered in the same way. It slithers over the surface but also in and out of the space. I call these things "unities" because, for ex-

ample, though the middle values represent flesh, ground, cloth, foliage and clouds, and even though some of these elements are near and some far, as middle values they are also experienced as a single thing on the surface. The light unity is both in front of, and behind, the dark unity, which sometimes interrupts it rudely: or visa versa—the dark unity curls around the light areas, like Hogarth's serpentine line.

Because the drawing of a figure expresses a thing we know, our attention seizes upon it — upon the figure as figure — and we tend to take for granted how what is on the surface — the marks and colors — carries us into the space. Unities, value areas for example, are not figures; they reference nothing from our visual experience. Unities are therefore properly non-representational. They are more abstract than the polygons or slatherings of abstract painting because non-objective painting forces us to be primarily conscious of lines and colors as such, because they are all there is to be conscious of. They, de facto, are the figuration. They are figuration by default. In true painting we do not see unities as figuration, we perceive them as meta-form, or "forms" generated by the forms (figures). Now, perceiving unities — more or less subliminally — as things on the surface, their paradoxically spatial relations become pictorial drama.

Painters have always been aware of these things. In his chapter 'Of Composition', discussing "foreground, middle ground and background" and the massing needed to achieve effects of depth or space, Hogarth wrote: "...a composition of lights and shades only, properly disposed, though ranged under no particular figures, might still have the pleasing effect of a picture." Hogarth's point is the basis of Hofmann's teaching, of abstract painting — or marks and colors "ranged under no particular figures" — nonetheless involves spatial relations. Abstract painting has space but cannot have meta-form, or unities which arise out of figures. The difference between representational and abstract painting is that the latter deprives itself of what it needs to achieve the very thing it aims at.



Dufy is a second wave painter who illustrates the use of unities in a striking manner. He distributes values and temperatures such that they correspond to the figuration either only approximately or not at all, as even this black and white reproduction makes clear. The darker value area on the left is blue, except for a patch of green which corresponds roughly to the table top, which can be made out as a very slightly lighter patch. That patch, as a value, remains part of the larger blue, or dark unity, but its relative warmth and different hue make it simultaneously something else. Dufy deliberately exploits the same illustrative/decorative tensions, which constitute true painting, as Boucher. The manner is different, it may seem that the Dufy is much looser than Boucher, or even haphazard by comparison, but part of Dufy's charm is exactly

this casual effect, which is really hidden artistry. The highly resolved quality of Boucher's work likewise disguises the wonderfully free inventiveness of his compositions.

Once you catch on to him, Boucher seems like an abstract painter who, as a sly trick, almost as an afterthought, transforms his abstraction into figuration. The multi-layered and paradoxical tensions of Dufy and Boucher's compositions, the masterful interaction of decorative and illustrative aspects in their work, make them fascinating to anyone sensi-

tive to painting. Illustrative images are interesting only for what they explicitly show. In true painting you get more than what you see. The, so to say, hidden quality of the compositional aspect of these paintings is a mystery we feel and experience, like an act of prestidigitation. They are like poems filled with graceful language and surprising metaphors. We



do not necessarily understand or perceive every meaning, or how the music of the language conveys it, but the thrust of the meaning reaches us, suffuses itself into our minds.

Mondrian's title, 'Composition No.1 Lozenge with Four Lines' (1930) already tells us we have to do with composition. This is third wave painting in its

purest form. We must not forget, however, that Mondrian arrived at abstraction via representation, particularly by painting trees. The example, above, shows his work when it was abandoning trees and had almost, but not quite, reached pure abstraction. This is not to suggest that 'Composition No. 1' is really a painting of a tree. Like all third wave painting, however, it is informed by awareness of space, or depth, as an inevitable element. The spatial implications of 'Composition No. 1' are perhaps not obvious, but if you look at it for a moment they will inevitably appear. Parts of the painting will advance, others will retreat. You will become

conscious of depth within and space outside the painting. I am not claiming that Mondrian had a spatial scheme he intended to make clear, or that spatial relations are a significant aspect of this painting—I believe Mondrian was discounting space more and more in his fascination with abstraction as he understood it—but he was certainly not unaware of the inevitable spatial implications of the decorative aspect.

Whatever Mondrian's attitude may have been regarding the subject or "figure" quality of his lines, Malevich's claim that his own polygons were objects (figures) not abstractions, applies to all abstract painting. Mondrian's lines, mutatis mutandis, are figures. But Boucher's bodies and trees, or Dufy's chairs, are different. They are figuration through which compositional forces express themselves. As illustration they resonate psychologically to function as a compositional pole missing from Mondrian, and all third wave work. We perceive a Boucher figure as a familiar thing, but also as volumes in space, and then again as a locus of intersecting colors, and ultimately as all these things at once in a matrix of interacting unities. Though inevitably we see Mondrian's lines as figures, they are not figures in that sense. As figuration they are radically abstracted. Nakedly non-objective, they cannot perform the compositional functions of traditional figuration. What compositional function do such "figures" have? It is not like the "line" from the foot of Boucher's bright Venus up and into the picture towards the putti in shadow. Such meta-forms cannot occur in Mondrian. 'Composition No. 1' is a diagram. As a painting it is utopian, a theoretical delight for a theoretical society. In the 1930s people could believe in that society and relish its productions, and painters could feel themselves its prophets and pioneers. That belief and those feelings are impossible today.

Mondrian's work is not without interest—I am fascinated by it. Its seriousness of purpose, its interesting and significant historical context, makes it at least respectable. But it is cold. The same might be said of all third wave painting. Klee and Miro manage to introduce a certain gaiety and lightness. Rothko seems to affect some people with a spiritual feeling. And the energy of Pollock and Klein, or the attractive colors of Frankenthaler and Sam Francis, might seem to have a certain warmth. But compared to painters like Dufy and Boucher, third wave painting is inhuman. That is a serious problem, but I am not complaining about what art should be—I am making a technical remark about painting.



Rejection of representation cuts away an element of composition. Whatever is supposed to be gained by radicalizing abstraction, is lost to composition, even though modernism understood abstraction, or the decorative aspect, as the core of composition.

I am not talking about the loss of illustrative storytelling content, but how the illustrative aspect, even reduced to the Expressionist, or spatial, minimum is an indispensable aspect of compositional dynamics as they have always been understood and actually function. 20th century radical abstraction compromises painting as much

as 19th century radical illustrativeness. Both are ultimately driven by theory, and that theory is the same in both cases, namely the demand that painting become a means to a end, and that end is...The Idea.

That the Abstractionists of the mid-20th century may have told themselves they were making art for art's sake, making painting about painting, does not undo how the art they were practicing is denatured by ideology. This is so much truer for the New Art that one can hardly do more than contemplate the situation in silence.

Enjoyment of painting does not require awareness of compositional principles, though painters must have it, consciously or naturally. Those principles are so basic and essential an aspect of painting that, like the foundations of a building, they are not necessarily apparent. Neither are they a technical thing only interesting to professionals. They are like modulation in music. Any listener feels the modulations and receives their message, but a professional musician recognizes them as modulation. The enjoyment and appreciation of such musical poetry is no less for the non-professional, the professional just has the practitioners familiarity with the tricks of the trade. Anyone can feel the effect of art. The connoisseur sees the artistry, but there is no need to be a high-diver

to admire the gracefully controlled twists and turns, or a chef to appreciate dishes by a master. There are people insensitive to such things, but that is another matter. Painting, like anything else, is not for everyone.

The unities of value are only the most obvious ones. There are also unities of the other properties of color: temperature, intensity and hue. If there are several blue things in a painting, however else we may perceive them, we also perceive them together as "the blue on the surface of the painting". But this unity of blue is probably at different places within the depth, in the space of the picture. The paradoxical spatial/surface drama inherent to true painting is inevitable. Unities of temperature (warm and cool colors) or intensity (bright and dull colors) not only form simple areas such as the three areas of value to which I reduced the Boucher (page 119) but overlap, intersect or are scattered, to create a complex of interactions. This occurs in the simplest paintings. It is not necessary that a composition be as elaborate or conveniently organized as a Boucher.

The unity dynamics also concern what is represented as such. Sky, people and trees—in their illustrative essence—also function as unities. Represented things are not pure abstractions, mere patches of color or compositional vectors, they are first of all themselves, coalescing in our perception as recognizable, illustrated things. In the simplified version of the Boucher (page 119), the sky—as sky—is a unity. But it consists of a light area and a middle value area, separate unities which live across the surface, and spatially, in different ways; e.g. the middle value unity is also vegetation which is nearer than the sky. A picture is composed of paradoxical and intermingling unities. Forms and colors are both nothing but themselves, while aspects of them—figures and color properties—become and do other things on the surface and in space. As Cezanne said, "Objects penetrate one another. They never cease to be alive."

The attempt to resume these interactions with words like "harmony" or "balance" is hopeless. One might say that the paradoxical relations of colors and forms are, or should be, harmonious, or balanced, but I don't see how they are, or should be either. They are characterized, rather, by tension, rupture, nuance, movement and combination. They add up to visual drama, whether a light-hearted classical symphony by Boucher, or a somber little song by ter Borch (opposite). With ter Borch the unities may be more obvious—or less so—the spatial tensions emphasized differently, the overlappings and interactions more sparingly or more

boldly accomplished, but the same things are occurring and the painting is as charming, alive and powerful as possible. The Boucher and the ter Borch can help us understand the Mondrian, and visa versa: a form on the surface — a form in space. In all three there is some relation to diamond-like shapes, which may help us see the relation of the three paintings. But, however different the shapes may be, the fundamental dynamics are the same.

They used to say "it takes ten years to make a painter". Those years were spent learning to take these things into account, to be so aware of them that they would be synthesized in each stroke of the brush. It is no simple matter, though a natural gift for some. What is true for the decorative and illustrative aspects simply — that any mark is both — must be multiplied many times when the several aspects of color, and their interactions with forms, are taken into account.

The unities — first of all but among other things — are areas of color considered non-representationally. But unities can only generate metaforms by conjuring them out of overlapping and intersecting figurative elements. When figurative elements are striped of their representational power so that they can only try to function as a naked unity, the metaformal dynamic withers. The difference between Abstract Expressionism and Boucher, is that the former denies itself the most basic tool of composition. Abstract, non-objective, or non-representational painting cannot escape figuration. Its streaks, drips and color fields represent themselves. They are figuration by default. We are highly conscious of them as paint on the surface, but they cannot generate meta-forms, because they would be meta-forms themselves! Pure decoration, like pure illustration, is a desiccated milieu in which the unities cannot arise, or only in an impoverished manner. The third wave non-objective painter, like the academic Neoclassic, is not functioning on the same level as Boucher or Dufy.

This is not because abstractionists can't draw — the third wave painters were excellent draftsmen. The reason is deeper. Boucher does everything the abstract painter does, to begin with! Depriving himself of representation, the abstractionist maims his art. When abstract painting collapsed, when it was no longer backstopped by Hofmann's figure drawing, when the importance of even push-and-pull was forgotten — the momentary concern with "ambiguous space" in the 1970s was a symptom of that forgetting — when post-surrealist personal expression became paintings

whole principle, painting denied itself even a crippled form of the pyrotechnical verve Boucher's composition so triumphantly displays.

The prejudice against Boucher, of even such serious Expressionists as Robert d'Arista—the painter who had the most formative influence on my own feeling about what painting is—indicates how much The Idea influenced painters who were otherwise so concerned with and sensitive to the decorative aspect. It was only and exactly the subject matter, an aspect of painting which Expressionism de-emphasized, which blinded them to Boucher's exemplary abstract force. This was not because Expressionists discounted the past. Chardin, a contemporary of Boucher, was always greatly appreciated by Expressionists. Chardin's seriousness, in fact the sobriety of his subject matter, and liberal use of brown like the Cubists, made his painting acceptable in a way the pink and light blue dimpled bottoms of Boucher were not.

The Idea makes us think we can do God's work better than He can. We take ourselves so seriously we lose sight of the essential.

There are other ways of painting than Boucher's way, and there are other painters who illustrate these things just as well — Dufy is only one. But true painting, in whatever manner, depends on awareness of these principles. It is surprising, however, that Boucher in particular was never important to the Abstract Expressionists or Cubists, because

he might well be considered, if not the father, certainly the titular deity of both. Boucher is obviously no Rembrandt, but the very lightness, playfulness or even frivolity of his subjects has something in common with second wave devaluation of representation and subject, while the jubilatory power of his decorative manipulations are exactly what the Cubists and Abstract Expressionist were after. Picasso and Boucher have more in common with each other than with Impressionism or Neoclassicism.



Robert d'Arista, self portrait: 1960, 14.5"x19"

THE STYLE

The post-surrealist doctrine of self-expression has replaced consciousness of the decorative and illustrative aspects of painting, of what drawing is and how color works, and how they function together. We are impressed by how expressive painting is — from the old masters to the Abstract Expressionists — but reducing art to this single aspect, and thinking expression can be got at directly and, what's more, via the unconscious, is to carry democratic hopefulness very far.

There are many things that make painting bad, most too obvious to mention. But painting that might or ought to be better, is usually weakened by lack of awareness of the factors discussed, and their implications. It was not drawing as a process of reproduction, and realistic coloring, that the old masters taught, it was the language and grammar of painting. Traces of this may be found in certain older writings, but our attitudes make their way of discussing it obscure. The early modernists, faced with an extreme illustrative deviation, were obliged to theorize painting more explicitly. The artistic situation today requires an even more explicit and exact explanation, to which I hope the above dissussion of composition might be a prelude.

But, even assuming my readers are willing to entertain the idea that painting functions in the way described, and that painting and art have the relation implied in these pages, such willingness does not necessarily extend to guidelines for what to paint, or in what manner to paint it. In our era of apparently vastly expanded freedoms, such proscriptions would seem to go too far. Abstraction, after its initial obligatory phase, is still heavy-handedly legitimated. It may be decorative, but room color choices are decorative also. The 'cultural' value of painting has faded to hardly a single degree above any random thing hung on a wall. The greatest masters of Western painting considered themselves artisans. The modern doctrine of artist as genius whose productions are somehow revelatory of profundities they alone are privileged to feel and express, was still plausible into the 1960s, when the painters in question were de Kooning and Pollock, though the sanity of both was considered questionable. Given how the New Art has devolved — I will not trouble to offer examples — the unconscious genius idea has worn thin, and sheer inertia seems to maintain the art establishment in rituals which are less and less convincing. Looming behind its glittering facade, is the nihilist doctrine that everyone is an artist and anything is art.

Jacques-Emile Blanche, in his 'From David to Degas', quotes Louis Charles Delescluze (1809-1871) an heroic revolutionary journalist:

"The art doctrine that David professed, which can be found in the speeches he made to the Convention, is utterly theoretical and reminiscent of what certain dogmatic antique philosophies, and above all what the body of modern ecclesiastic and sacred doctrine, try to establish. Art, in this case, is no longer an end, but a means."

The New Art is a means that disguises itself as an end. It pretends to be a clean slate upon which anyone can inscribe their creativity. In fact it is a sop to a decadent and demagogical promise of radical egalitarianism, concerning not only human rights but human capacity. It is one thing to say we are all God's children, or that each person owns a conscience which makes them a node of experience and desire as much as anyone else, it is quite another to pretend that significant artistic achievements can be made by anyone, given that some people are lazy or unsuited.

Art, as content, reduces art to a means even more radically than Neoclassicism, which at least retained some of the craftsmanship of the real thing. In the Age of Anxiety content has become political and psycho-social posturing. With the prospect of infinite 'cultural' progress unclouded, and the injunction of obligatory originality in force, it is hard to imagine how the next step can be anything hopeful.

To this dark view it may be objected that there has been a return to a more balanced attitude; since 1990 representation is no longer banned, and a thousand flowers are allowed to bloom. In fact an infinite number of flowers are blooming, to such an extent that the word "art" no longer exists as a term of distinction. How far back from this situation is it prudent, proper, or even possible, to draw? A correction, as the history of Modernism itself shows, might provoke over-reaction in a wrong direction, and I have no desire to urge anything which might lead to some new flavor of art-treason.

The doctrine of originality is a formidable barrier. Since the 19th century, art history, the legitimate business of which is to make dis-

tinctions, has emphasized the stylistic variety of modern painting. This emphasis on diversity has been exacerbated by growing interest in art from other societies, which in recent years has evolved into an assault on Western art. Far be it from me, a lover of Japanese art in particular, and participator in forms of Contemporary Art, to wish to denigrate anything beautiful and worthwhile. My own father was an origami master, perhaps the greatest origami master of all time (you could look it up: decide for yourself), and I helped him build his ball-machines which, if they are not Contemporary Art in the pure-content sense, are certainly contemporary artistry in the service of making something delectable, as Poussin prescribed, yet concerning machines. So my intention is not to stop anyone from doing anything. But doing something because there is prestige attached to it, particularly when that prestige is supposed to slake an existential thirst, is not the same thing as doing what you want — assuming what we want ought to be tempered by an effort to know what is true and right.

The incompetence of a sincere amateur may be artistically unsatisfactory but it cannot be offensive unless it is passed off as something it is not. But accepting the status of amateur has become a conspicuous act of humility. Rarely a popular virtue, humility is less popular than ever in the metaverse of universal god-like freedom. But we are all beginners now. This was already the attitude of Renoir in his time, and it is vastly more apropos today. As beginners we had better be humble. But humility is not blindness.

The doctrine that all art is equal, that charming Eskimo stone carvings or African wood sculpture is the same kind of thing as Praxiteles, Ghiberti and Maillol, is a problem. There are relations between arts which used to be understood on a scale from primitive, perhaps clumsy, beginnings to mature perfection, perhaps eventually decadent. Stampeded by ideology, whirled about in the kermess of all periods and places, like it or not we are once again primitives — but that need not mean crude or ugly. It did not mean those things when applied to Masaccio.

There are specificities to the arts of different societies. That does not mean they are separate worlds among which comparison, concordance, mutual appreciation and judgement are impossible or illegitimate. Objects created with ritual or social purposes may be art, but ritual and social purpose are not art, and may indeed be incommensurable with the ritual

and social purpose of other societies. What is properly art is another matter.

Untangling the religious, social, historic, climatic and other non-artistic aspects from different artifacts may be complicated, but it has nothing to do with enjoying, respecting and understanding them. I do not consider Norman Rockwell a great painter. According to older standards, those of his own time in fact, he was not a painter at all—he was an illustrator. Furthermore his work was conditioned by the technical requirements of magazine cover reproduction—a thinly painted matte surface, etc.—and his subjects were based on current events now sometimes forgotten, and attitudes some of which have evolved. None of that stops me from greatly enjoying his work for exactly what it is. Necessity being the mother of invention, the limits within which Rockwell worked, its constraints and demands, are revelatory of his creative strength.

As for Japanese art, I love it so much that at one point I worked only with brush and ink. But my struggle to be a Japanese painter, or to be like one, taught me that there are limits, or directions, in Japanese painting which carry obligations. I realized that were I to cleave to certain intentions characteristic of western painting—intentions of which I had been unconscious, and discovered I was unwilling to abandon—I would be obliged to abandon my japanophilic direction. The qualities of Japanese art in question, if they can be understood as limits in one sense, are strengths in another.

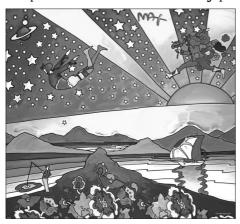
Japanese art is characterized by a great or even overwhelming love of the decorative, particularly irregular pattern as it is discovered in nature. It is not as if Japanese art never expresses space or volume, or never uses right angles, but when it does it never takes them far enough to interfere with the beauties of irregular pattern. Irregular pattern has something philosophical or even spiritual about it. "Glory be to God for dappled things" wrote Gerard Manley Hopkins. A face, a human body, is symmetrical, but not if inspected with care, and most of nature is an asymmetrical riot of pied beauty. The Japanese are very sensitive to this. They have made it a cornerstone of their art.

Japanese society is much more artistic than Western society. Their approach to art is even suited to making, as they traditionally did, every artifact, no matter how humble, a work of art. Achieving this — in textile design, architecture, pottery, metallurgy and so on — would be impos-

sible were they to emphasize illusion, space and symmetry to the same degree as Western art. The Japanese, traditionally at least, made all of life a work of art — not only every object, but the positions and gestures of their own bodies, as if life were a perpetual dance. Western society has its typical attitudes and gestures, but they are improvised and non-obligatory, not codified and ubiquitous as in Japan.

Japanese and Western art are therefore distinctly different. Does this impede mutual understanding, as the proponents of emergent reality theory insist? There is a long history of mutual admiration and emulation between Japan and the West; it is not plausible that it has all been confusion and incomprehension. To the contrary, that Japan and the West have been so interested in each other, it is only natural that mutual artistic understanding has developed. By "understand" I do not mean the kind of descriptive analysis I offer here, but the instinctive enthusiasm that might eventually be the basis of such an analysis — the analysis being only a reflection of the enthusiasm, in which vocabulary as well as sense and feeling play a part.

There are clear examples of Japanese influence on the West, and the opposite, like Ukiyo-e and Van Gogh, or Disney and Hayao Miyazaki. But there are also artists, like Peter Max, who might never have been influenced by Japanese art. The art of Peter Max does not relate to nature the way Japanese art does, but it does emphasize irregular pattern. The preoccupations of Japanese art are not alien to Western art. There is much Western art that emphasizes nature, and some that emphasizes pattern. The difference between Japanese and Western art is not a mat-



ter of kind, but of emphasis and direction. Take the American and Japanese flags. Where the American flag is symmetrically arranged with horizontal, vertical and regular forms, the Japanese battle ensign is asymmetrical and dominated by irregular diagonals. Circles—the sun, the full moon, flowers, the waves made in puddles when you toss in a pebble—are a form found in



nature. Rectangles are man-made. The American flag is a conventional sign for the original thirteen colonies and so on, it is something you must learn to read. The

Japanese flag suggests the shining sun, a thing in nature anyone can understand at a glance. But the Japanese can easily learn the meaning of the American flag — a few seconds of explanation is sufficient — just as any American can see that the





Japanese flag shows the sun. Both are statements in the language of national flags—but each has its own things to say.

The same, mutatis mutandis, is true for the language of painting. Take Japanese and Venetian painting: Hokusai and Titian are different in many ways, but they both draw people. However profound and infinite their work may be in ways proper to themselves as individuals, members of their society, or creatures of their time, at first glance their work is already perfectly legible and expressive of things instantly comprehensible.

Japanese art, like Japan itself, has a long and storied history. Eskimos, living where and as

they do, have an art mostly limited to forms scraped out of small rocks. But within that modest scope they manage to express so much of their experience and observation that admiration cannot be withheld. It is no denigration of Eskimos, or their delightful art, not to accord it the same status as Michelangelo's 'Pieta' or Bernini's 'Saint Teresa'. Everything doesn't have to be ultimate. We can recognize and appreciate things for what they are, for their proper qualities, without worrying about their relative status. Phony



celebration of everything as unique and ultimate, blunts our sensibilities and destroys what there is to celebrate. Appreciation and understanding depend on discrimination and judgement. Discrimination does not have to be denigration and judgement does not have to be condemnation. That art holds up no bridges cheapens the consequences of ignoring the realities upon which it depends. But that cost is not zero—eventually it means living without it.

To speak only of Western art, the variety of styles from Cezanne to Warhol—to say nothing of styles before or since—puts painting in a dilemma: every possible approach has been worn out. Even Art Brut, a style from the 1940s, despite its renewal as Outsider Art in the 1970s, is only one more establishment-sanctioned dead-end, barring the way to even a neo-paleolithic fresh start. We are like Alice at the banquet of the Red Queen: before you can eat it, the food is taken away. What approach is legitimate when "going back", as they say, to any previous style violates the sacrosanct doctrine of originality? Anything authentic and genuine is its own source, its own origin; everything else is derivative, mere imitation, only copy. The derivative or imitative is irrelevant because not alive in the now. Art not brought forth out of nothing is not original, and the locus of that nothing is the artist.

This dilemma for painting has hemorrhaged into a dilemma for all aspects of life.

Every person, like every grain of sand and each snowflake, is unique. It is not only our fingerprints; however similar we may be, everyone is physically and experientially unique. Since Egyptian antiquity the most common subject of painting is the human form. This is still true in Contemporary Art—to the extent it presents subjects at all. With the spiralling of Contemporary Art into performance about personal and social pain, the human body is more central than ever. But originality cannot be claimed for the human form as subject, any more than for the states of the human soul.

I have often been accused of irrelevance on the grounds that I do not paint contemporary subjects, which really means the industrial trappings and fashionable accourtements of our day — because the human form and face have not altered in all recorded history, nor have trees, apples and flowers. Some of my paintings are religious or mythological scenes, and

it is those above all which provoke judgements of irrelevance. But when I bring out paintings with cars or day-glow safety vests (page 155), the case for my irrelevance shifts from my subject matter to my manner.

There have been many manners of painting in Europe from the 13th to the 19th century, though not so many that they can't be listed with ease, and the boundaries between them are not always clear. To someone unfamiliar with European painting many distinctions of style important to art historians would be indiscernible. Few painters and paintings are as instantly recognizable as Arcimboldo and the late work of Turner, but that has more to do with subject than style: faces made of plants and animals, and bright red and yellow skies. On the next page are seven Dutch paintings from the 17th century, all in the well-known style practiced, but not invented, by Vermeer. They are by Dou, de Hooch, van Meiris, Steen, de Man, Metsu and Sorgh—in no particular order. It would be easy to double the number of excellent 17th century Dutch painting of exactly this sort by other painters. Some of them may be better than others, maybe in every way, maybe only in some ways. None of them, however, are original, at least not in any way that is obvious. Five of them involve music, four have people doing things at a table. Most look more

or less squarely into a room, but one shows the room at a diagonal: more original? Or the one without a side wall...but such distinctions are obviously trivial.

17th century Dutch painting is one of the most celebrated periods of European painting. Its greatest exponent, Rembrandt, was notoriously following the lead of an Italian painter from two centuries before, as was that other 17th century Dutch celebrity, Rubens. Vermeer, famous for his interiors, is a huge international star, but the Dutch themselves are more enthusiastic about Jan Steen, to whom little attention is paid elsewhere.



This takes nothing away from Vermeer, but the Dutch way of appreciating painting might have something to teach us. But whether it is Vermeer or Jan Steen who is the preeminent exponent of this sort of painting — or de Hooch who was Aaron Kurzen's favorite — the differences between them are hardly extreme.









17th century Dutch painting influenced certain 18th and 19th century French painters, notably Fragonard, Chardin and Fantin Latour. Are these painters less original for that? The manner of painting may be considered original, but how original are any of its practitioners? Aside from the goofy clothes, how truly different are any of theses paintings from Van Eyke's famous 'Arnolfini portrait'? (page 135). That painting is from the 15th century, 200 years earlier. Or, for that matter, how different from a Jacques-Emile Blanche, a first wave modernist (page 138) or one of

my own paintings made in the 21st century (page 139, below) or even the second wave painter Vuillard (page 139, above)? Either none of these painters are original — provisionally excepting the Van Eyke—or each of them is original in their own way, because just as each person's fingerprints and handwriting are unique, so each painter's brushwork, color preferences, manner of composition, way of seeing things, etc. are also unique.

Anyone who has haunted museums as much as I have —









though I made no effort to make myself an historian or an expert—instantly recognizes the hand of de Hooch, Metsu and Jan Steen, even in these little black and white reproductions. Because, as similar as they all are—all are obviously 17th century Dutch painters—they are also different in an infinite number of ways which, with a little familiarity, becomes as obvious as their Dutch origin.

So, is there only one painting, one painter, who would be original—let's give Van Eyke the benefit of the doubt, unless a Roman fresco of a couple in a room compromises that (page 141)—and all the others

are irrelevant because interiors with people have already been done. Or, on the other hand, all of them are original, because if you look closely enough, they are all different in innumerable ways.

But, it will be objected, if you painted this way in the 17th century in Holland, that is original enough. These painters were in their zeitgeist, it was their time. Even though they were obviously all copying each other, because it was their time, and doing that in their time was legitimate, none are irrelevant and all are original. But maybe it was because they were copying each other, learning from each other, being inspired by each other, that the 17th century Dutch painters were all so strong? Is the Vuillard original because—a modern innovation?—it shows someone from the back? But so does Adriaen Brouwer, another 17th century Dutchman (page 140). Or is Van Eyke not original because, being ahead of his time, his work is not of its time? It becomes a ridiculous word game.

The unique and original quality of all painters is such that only the most skillful forgers can trick people into thinking their work is the work of someone else—and such a skill is so rare it might itself be considered original. But forgers are not in the business of making good paintings, they are trying to be exactly like another painter because

those painters are worth a lot of money. But real painters, even if they are working in the way their teachers taught them, or a way popular among their fellows, don't care whether their work is like someone else's. They are trying to do good work.



Kurzen used to say, "Titian

is painting". Titian's preeminence suggests that he, at least, must certainly be original. Like all painters, Titian's work is distinguished by many things, some of them obviously sui generis. But there are two aspects of his work which account for much of its significance, the influence of his teacher Bellini and of his friend Giorgione. If the marvellous freedom of Titian's late work owes nothing to anyone, without those two influences it would have been impossible for him to become the painter he was. Titian's early composition, drawing, and coloring are modeled on the very developed state to which Bellini had carried the art. From Giorgione, Titian learned to soften his outlines and use values in a new way to enhance illusion. Titian did learn these things from Giorgione, but he might have learned them from Leonardo or Correggio. Such are the accidents of history. It takes nothing away from Titian's preeminence to suggest that, had he not existed, other painters, by other avenues, would



have assembled the same influences, and something like the impulse that Titian gave painting would have come about. But Titian did exist, he did do what he did, and I think we should all be grateful for that. I certainly am.

In the 19th and 20th century Cezanne had an influence comparable to that of Titian in the 16th and 17th. Cezanne's work however, is conditioned by factors, and has influences, which might temper our sense of its originality. Painting landscape, 'sur le

motif', or outside, while looking at what you painted, became fashionable in the late 18th century. Corot, Boudin, and the Barbizon school painters worked this way. Cezanne followed the Barbizon school in this respect, except for his bathers. Cezanne and Van Gogh* were called Impressionists at first. Today they seem more related to Gauguin, Seurat, Denis and other Post-Impressionists, because their work is more decorative than Impressionism. Putting less emphasis on light effects, it is less illustrative than Monet or Sisley. But Cezanne's approach to painting is



based on that of Corot, Jongkind, and particularly early Pissarro.

Cezanne started his painting career late, and just as mastering a musical instrument without training as a child is difficult, so it is with drawing. Had Cezanne been trained young, he might have been able to draw like Ingres, as he desired. Instead he devised a method of drawing based on cylinders, cones and spheres — which possibly influenced Fernand Léger's brand of Cubism. But the "original" character this method gives to Cezanne's drawing is the result of an expedient, not an expressive choice. If expedients are to be considered artistically original, originality would only mean difference, without artistic significance.

Fragonard's youthful work is practically indistinguishable from that of his teacher, Boucher. When Pissarro took up Impressionism, and later Pointillism, his work is often indistinguishable from other practitioners of those methods. Some work by Veronese and Tintoretto is hard to distinguish from that of their teacher, Titian. Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, whose personality is distinct when you are familiar with his work, is often indistinguishable from his father, Giovanni Battista. Certain paintings by Guardi are hard to distinguish from Canaletto. This list could be prolonged indefinitely. The exigency of originality is a left-over from the dialectical materialist and progressive Marxism which infected painters more than a century ago. Clinging to it is like stabbing a corpse.

^{*} Van Gogh was a great master of drawing. Despite the extreme popularity of certain paintings, his work as a whole is not well known, and the part played by his mental illness usually not taken into account.



But Originality is problematic in a different and more interesting way. A beginner does his best, following what he has been taught and whatever he can manage to understand. As he advances, his personality begins to be expressed in his work. And when a level of mastery is attained his personality becomes clear—the greater the mastery, the more the personality is revealed. In Classical Realism, by contrast, where

the training involves nothing more than learning the trick of optical reproduction, its practitioners show more personality at their clumsy beginnings, because the end product, the goal of their training, is not artistic, not expressive, but a strictly mechanical feat.

By expression I do not mean deliberate display of "personality", according to post-surrealist doctrine whereby the more wild and abandoned the gestures, the greater the personal expression. In properly artistic pursuits, the higher the artistry and greater the expressive potential, the more the artist's personality is revealed — not because the work develops in the direction of personality but because as the work develops towards perfection personal characteristics inevitably become evident.

Personality is like a watershed, it channels and blocks. A painter's love of, interest in, relation to this or that aspect of his subject and tools, and the contrary — his dislikes and ignorances — all push his work in certain directions. This is what we call personality. What one painter lacks, another does not. For this reason de Hooch is instantly distinguishable from Jan Steen, Tintoretto from Veronese, Gainsborough from Reynolds.

It is difficult to criticize undeveloped work because almost everything about it is weak or bad. The teacher must encourage, choosing which areas should be developed at a given stage. But the work of masters is different, few things are wrong, but what is, so to speak "wrong" stands out clearly, and is identical with what gives the work personality, what makes it so characteristic that it is instantly recognizable as the work of that particular artist, just as we recognize friends at a distance by their posture or clothes.

Were everyone's posture perfect, and their clothes all ideal, then only

the height and girth of our friends would distinguish them, but those very qualities would, again, be deviations from an ideal human form. Ideal for what? Let us postulate an all-round ideal, the best skeletal and muscular configuration for health and typical work.

In the same way we might postulate an ideal painting. Which would be closest to that ideal: Leonardo's 'Mona Lisa', 'Les Meninas' by Velásquez', 'Corésus and Callirhoé' by Fragonard, 'Madame Charpentier et ses enfants' by Renoir? Each of these masterpieces satisfies painting desires the others do not, each has qualities the others lack. We might postulate a painting, a way of painting, that satisfied all our desires, that has all the perfections of the best paintings. But here, before our eyes, are masterpieces the lovable qualities of which depend on the very weakness, which is to say the particularities of the personalities of the masters who are their authors. Our critique - what delights us here, what is missing there - points to an ideal kind of painting, painting which would have all possible virtues simultaneously. But to do such painting one would have to be all painters simultaneously, or a conjunction of the best part of each. To be that painter our experience would have to be universal: student of Bellini and of Boucher, Corot in the cold dew at sunrise, Delacroix in his studio at midnight. It is amusing to contemplate, but obviously and hopelessly impossible as an actual project.

Still, the thought is not worthless, and surely has been thought before. When Fragonard went to Rome, Boucher warned him not to take the 16th century masters too seriously. Discovering them, he nonetheless became despondent. Late Rembrandt's struggles to emulate Titian produce something very like Titian in certain ways, yet it is Rembrandt's most characteristic work. Fragonard, turning from heroes sure he could never equal, rejecting the splendid public career offered by France, bravely treading the modest path opened by his heart, wrought things worthy of his abandoned hopes. Sighting along the trajectories of the greatest painters, invisible yet felt, we might discern the far summits of perfection. Our humanity, our mortality, the exigencies of time and place, are chains that forbid us heights we might yet glimpse and bravely approach.

More practically, the parameters of a style corresponding to such an ambition would, to begin with, certainly not be very different from the style of the greatest painters throughout history — which happen to have a good deal in common, despite the ultimately superficial, trivial and

often non-artistic differences by which art history too often lives and dies. What then, is that style? It is not anything that hampers anyone's natural tendencies or inclinations. It accommodates love of nature and illusion, and also love of construction and composition, but prefers both together. It demands love of the materials, but tolerates paint thin or thick, lines hard or soft, colors dark or light. It depends, however, on mastery of drawing, not as optical transcription but as the vocabulary and grammar of the language of painting.

These indications, if they map out the boundaries within which true painting can occur, are not yet stylistic indications in the manner usually understood. Style, as I am describing it, is different from individual style as we often understand the word. It is something akin to the style of a school: Florentine (Masaccio) Venetian (Veronese) Roman (Domenichino) 17th century Dutch (Hals) English, French or Italian 18th century (Hogarth, Boucher, Tiepolo) or 19th century (Delacroix). This list of schools, and painters typical of them, which might be much longer, nonetheless stretches across 500 years and much of Europe. It is an all-star group, but leaves out many super-stars (Leonardo, Michelangelo, Titian, Raphael, Poussin, Rembrandt), and the landscape painters (Claude, Guardi, Constable, Turner, Corot). But landscape is less useful here, because: as the figure, so everything else. Style is based on the figure. And it is not necessary to begin with the very greatest paintings, because it is The Style itself, not its perfections, with which we have to do.

The Style cannot rightly be called that of a school, because it is too widely used. It is the style behind the styles of the schools. For us it is a proposition, a high road, a solution to the dilemma of the infinity of used up, irrelevant choices. The Style, common to all painters over all centuries, has two major elements: simplification and caricature. Both rule out optical transcription, and both contribute to composition.

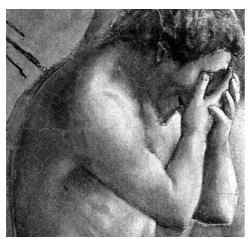
Simplification means, rather than copy them, aspects of the model are set aside in favor of forms that are, not geometrical but more regular than what is observed. Taking inspiration from what is observed, the artist eliminates enough color accident and detail so that color spread on the canvas can serve composition as well as representation.

Caricature means adjusting forms so they strongly express what they are. If a nose is long, it may be made a bit longer. The curve of a limb may be emphasized, a gesture made emphatic enough that it speaks with rhe-

torical authority. Caricature depends on simplification, and simplification depends on caricature. To emphasize a form, simplifying it brings out the important characteristics. Simplification is a form of caricature, while caricature is a form of simplification because, to bring out the expression, what is superfluous should be set aside.

Shapes must be simplified so that they become compositional elements, and their movements caricatured so that their expression is felt. Movements in space also — when something thrusts back or forward, that must be made sensible. To achieve this, exaggeration, or caricature, must be used. Simplification and caricature must be exercised with taste: not too much, but not too little. This taste has to be developed, and the best way is familiarity with the masters.

Until 1960, while the old classifications held, even painters from Cimabue

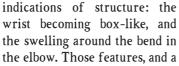




and Giotto until before Raphael, were called "primitive". Masaccio, considered an innovator regarding perspective,* was nonetheless among them. In any case Masaccio has never been forgotten since his time, and his simple, pre-Raphaelesque treatment of the human body is good enough for any self-respecting painter, and certainly a good place to start. Compared to this photo of a female body-builder's arm, Masaccio's arm includes only major elements. The outline below the upper arm is practically straight, and the forearm is almost a cone, with only two

^{*} To turn painting into a clear and exciting story of progress, filled with heroic firsts, historians obscure much of what is essential by making a fuss about secondary matters and transforming vague half-truths into monumental benchmarks. Perspective is one of the concepts they most misunderstand and abuse. Masaccio, and other painters of his time, were a bit more concerned with illusions of depth than previous painters tended to be, but the difference that made to his painting is exaggerated, and in any case not what makes him such a wonderful artist.



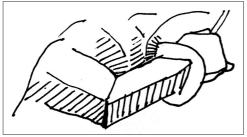




host of others, are present in the photo. Masaccio simplifies and caricatures. Note the rectangular fingers, a Cezanne-like solution.

This female and male arm by Rubens are more sophisticated, more like the Greek statuary which inspired Raphael, but still simplified compared to a photographic rendering, and notably caricatured. Rubens almost transforms his forearms into spheres, while the box-like wrists are indicated with a light touch. Rubens turns a body into sphere-like volumes growing rhythmically out of each other. It is that quality, the robust gracefulness, which is so expressive, and which, if it is present in the model, could not be present to that degree. But Rubens used no models









Hogarth Domenichino Veronese

here. He knew the figure and used it expressively, but that expression, as caricatured or distorted as it may be, is always fundamentally faithful to human anatomy, as was Masaccio, though Rubens is more exuberant.

The folds in the sleeve of one of Hogarth's self portraits do not obscure the boxy form to which Hogarth has simplified the arm to caricature the movement.

The female arms of Domenichino seem made of spheres and cones; photographic detail is totally absent. The Veronese forearm seems even simpler: one curved line below, a very slight compound curve above, the elbow structure indicated with quiet exaggeration to give a feeling of volume.

Real painters don't copy, they transform reality—nature—into a poem. Genuine art teaching bears on things such as how the unrealistically thick wrists of Veronese are a beauty proper to painting.

Boucher amazes with his sculpted and interlocking forms, with their charming



lights and shadows, but their grace dissimulates their simplicity. The arm raised to the nymph's forehead is constructed of stubby spheres, and her hand is a rectangular slab.

Tiepolo (below, left) exaggerates the arm's undulations and dimples, caricaturing them into something larger than life. He elongates the forearm to accommodate this approach. A feeling of strength arises from these exaggerations: soft but pronounced undulations such as the impossibly deep transition from deltoid to biceps. Veronese, to a similar expressive end, does the opposite: suppressing undulation and shortening the arm — another kind of caricature, but the goal is always expression.

With the arm of his famous 'Liberty Leading the People', like Tiepolo Delacroix makes much of small forms, but rather than building the arm from spheres like Rubens and Boucher, he makes a cylinder which he

modifies delicately with restrained undulations inspired by anatomy, achieving an expression of triumphant strength.

How different is Masaccio from Delacroix? The most important aspect of their work is the expression, and both are indeed expressive. Their way of drawing the figure, if the results are somewhat different,









share the principles of simplification and caricature. Beyond that, both effectively represent arms. Rubens carries the idea in one direction, Tiepolo in another, both use the same tools: simplification and caricature, the basis of The Style. What violates the

style is optical transcription on the one hand, and carrying simplification and caricature so far that figures become cartoons or schematics on the other. It is the area between that is The Style.

The Style is the approach of true painting: the illustrative and decorative aspects in right-relation. There is only one fundamental style in true painting. It is like ice-cream, there are many brands and many flavors but it is all ice-cream.*

To bring the series of arms up to date, a 21st century flavor, arms painted by me (above). I show them not to pretend to the status of master, but talk is cheap. I show my efforts to practice what I preach, to help my readers judge if I am to be trusted. My work seems to me quite different from the previous examples but, were I obliged to say, I think it has more in common with Masaccio and Dominecino than the others, but could never be mistaken for those painters. I try to follow the masters, not imitate them. Imitation is both impossible and pointless. Opposite, however, is the painting Roger Scruton took for a Boucher. I might have been

^{*} In a book Van Gogh appreciated, 'Grammaire des Art du Dessien', 1876, Charles Blanc, artist and twice head of the academy, wrote: "But outside the diverse styles which are the nuances of feeling consecrated by the masters, there is something general and absolute which we call The Style."

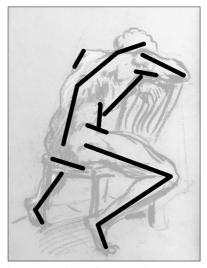
flattered by this, but Scruton held Boucher in contempt. His mistake is a reflection on his poor understanding of art, not a sensible comment on the painting. This painting has cost me many accusations of irrelevance. It is no Boucher—I only wish it were—but it resembles something, it is not called kitsch and irrelevant for no reason. That reason, I say, is The Style, which it shares with all true painting, good and bad. For true painting can indeed be bad painting. Awareness of the principles, honest struggle to put them into practice, and even successfully doing so, is no guarantee that a painting be interesting or, as Poussin would demand, delectable. There are so many imponderables in a vast art like painting that, while mastery of the basics is necessary, it is not sufficient.

To be honest, I think my 'Europa' (finished circa 2007) is more like Thomas Hart Benton than anything else, which might support the idea that geographical or national influence is real. Benton, who died when I was nineteen, like many paidnters of his generation combined academic training with second wave enthusiasms and Social Realism — or Regional Painting as it was sometimes called. Jackson Pollock was a student of Benton, who apparently taught him wiggly lines.

One cannot begin aiming at The Style, however, without mastering the basics of drawing, which demands three things, 1: placing the figure (or subject whatever it might be) properly in the page (i.e. filling the page with the figure) 2: expressing volumes effectively, 3: expressing the





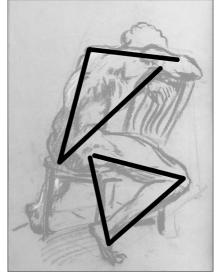


character of the figure and pose, its proportions and action.

To place the figure, and sim-

plify and caricature it meaningfully, requires understanding it, seeing it for what it is. This requires eye-training. Without this basic skill the draftsman is incapable of making choices, of expression. A human form is dauntingly complex. The beginner can start by trying to understand it as simple shapes, or to express its major directions and positions with





simple lines. Drawing is fundamentally a process of placement which demands a constant effort of comparison and measurement, vertically, horizontally (and in depth), to seize the proper place of each part.

Sighting along a ruler held vertically, one sees that, A: the elbow extends farther than the knee, B: the farthest rightward extent of the head is approximately above where the calf meets the thigh, C: the nape of the neck is to the right of the foot, D: the corner of the left shoulder is to the right of the lowest point of the buttocks, E: the lowest point of the foot on the left is slightly lower than the top of the heel of the other foot, F-G-H: the intersection of the thigh and stomach is higher than the middle of the figure as a whole, the distance HG is greater than GF.

Such calculations, first for major parts, then within the parts as necessary, are the work of drawing. The student must also know the tricks of representing volume, an important aspect of the language of drawing which is best learned by copying the masters.

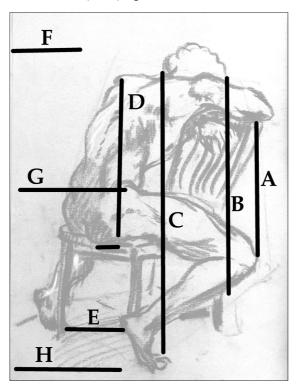


Figure drawing from the class of Clarence Washington, 1976

Most beginners must overcome the natural tendency to see with their experience, rather than their eyes. Failing to see the actual proportions of a thing results in drawing which is more sign than expression of form in space. For example, when drawing a head, children and beginners tend to make the face too big, putting the eyes at the top and the mouth at the bottom. Eyes and mouth are important to us as the most expressive parts. But, looking at a face straight on, the eyes are about half way between the top of the head and the bottom of the chin, and the chin area, like the forehead, is large compared to the distance between mouth and nose. The would-be draftsman must learn to see these proportions.



Simplification and caricature are the basis of drawing, whatever the period or nation. Hokusai's 18th century manual of drawing includes this page (above), and Luca Cambiaso, a 16th century painter, made drawings which reduce figures, not to Cezanne's cylinders, spheres and cones, but to cubic forms (opposite, above). In both cases it is simplification and caricature which allow powerful expression of volumes in space. A relation of drawing, and ultimately composition, to geometry is how complex forms can be understood and expressed through simplification. Bodies, or compositions, have an organic quality because the relations of parts are



comprehensible. A head, for example, which is a complex shape when the features are taken into consideration, can be understood, to begin with and even fundamentally, as a sphere or cube in relation to other simple shapes, or geometrically.

Drawing is a language, and all languages are simplified models of experience the purpose of which is expression, communication, a meeting of minds, communion. Photography would be useless if it somehow reproduced things in four dimensions, instead of being a two dimensional impression from a single point of view at a single moment. Were it an

actual reproduction of a whole event in all its volumetric, material and temporal reality, if it actually equaled what it represented, it would tell us nothing about the original, it would simply "be" the original, and could not be an expression of anything. When drawing is no longer understood as language, but as an ultimately hopeless and pointless attempt at reproduction, it ceases to be itself.

What about decorative exaggeration, second wave extremism, or Expressionism? Is this 1919 painting by Schmidt-Rottluff true painting? It

is a portrait, and the subject is recognizable despite the eye and nose. The hand is constructed. The relation of head, hand and body is graceful. Schmidt-Rottluff studied theology and architecture. He was a draftsman. When he returned from the war The Idea was running away with the world. I respect and appreciate Schmidt-Rottluff, but I cannot respect those, today, who use Expressionism as an excuse for poor or absent



draftsmanship and capriciousness, and want others to congratulate them for honest work. Allowances should be made for historical circumstance. Work which embodies the particular passions and ideals Schmidt-Rottlu brings to his, is impossible today because our situation is so different. We have lived a further century in the evolving crisis of art, another century of the Age of Anxiety. In 1919 the ideals of the second wave were inspiring and even overwhelming in a way that, today, we can perhaps understand but cannot feel. A century later, it is an act of disrespect for the high aspirations, sacrifice and suffering of those genuine artists to use their work as an excuse for shallow, lazy, self-indulgent pretension.

Schmidt-Rottluff, to speak only of him, was a genuine artist. He lived in a time profoundly and insidiously perturbed by non-artistic factors, and yet dedicated himself, heart and soul, to art. His moment is gone. It is one thing to go back to The Style, which is the permanent foundation of painting — which even Schmidt-Rottluff understood and respected, for this portrait is marked by simplification and caricature, which is exaggerated in some ways, but in most ways not — it is another to pretend one is "going beyond", or making "historical progress" in relation to an artist like Schmidt-Rottluff, when all one is really doing is shamefully exploiting something without understanding it.

One does not go back to The Style. One simply goes to it. The language of painting is like the language of love — the glances, gestures and embracing — both are universal and eternal human possessions.



'Loulou Dupuis, Gilet Jaune', Paul Rhoads, 2018, gouache on paper

SCHOOLS ISMS and ARTS

Art and society are confounded in the word "culture", a sense of the word developed in the 19th century. Originally a farming term for plowing, then for fostering plants and caring for animals, in the 17th century it began to be used metaphorically: the mind being like a garden, "cultivated" people are "cultured", or learned in arts and sciences. The traditional view had been that politics and religion were the fundamentals of society. But the new scientific thinking saw geography as the social fundamental. From geography arises race; race then gives rise to religion and art. Put another way, the invisible (spiritual and artistic feeling) is a product of the visible (matter, earth, race). The structures thus generated are "cultures". This is a root of The Idea.

The word civilization originated in the 18th century. To be civilized, to live together with civility, provokes development of art and science. The more a society is civilized, the more developed its arts and sciences.

The differences between civilizations are vertical, some higher or more developed than others. The differences between cultures are horizontal; each culture is its own measure. A cannibal civilization is low, but a cannibal culture is as good as any other. The concepts "civilization" and "culture" coexisted through the 19th century, but in the late 20th century the words "civilization" and "cultivated", with their hierarchical implications, became suspect. Banishment of hierarchical relations between societies, and consequently between individuals, is the essence of the metaverse. It opens the way for Contemporary Art, and eventually the contemporary artization of every aspect of society and life, and culminates in hysterical insistence that every person may, and even does, determine the truth of all things for themselves. This radical program can be at least partly realized in many areas and, so it seems, fully realized in art.

Since the French revolution, art has been understood in scientific terms: Neoclassicism, Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Suprematism, Futurism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Minimalism. These words, like Liberalism, Marxism or antidisestablishmentarianism, are scientific in tone and intent. They betray the influence of science, of The Idea.

Previously, what we call "styles" were called "schools": the Roman

school, the Neapolitan school, the French school, the English school, the Northern school and so on. The differences between the schools — since they all use The Style — were much less pronounced than the differences between the Isms. An 18th century painting of the English school (e.g. a history painting or portrait by Reynolds) has much more in common with a 16th century Venetian school painting (e.g. a Veronese), than Neoclassicism, Impressionism and Cubism have with each other. After the period of the Isms came the period of the "Arts": Pop Art, Conceptual Art, Performance Art, Junk Art, Street Art, Outsider Art, Food Art and etc., all part of Contemporary Art. As diverse as the Isms may be among themselves, diversity among the Arts are infinitely more so.

Schools, Isms and Arts respectively correspond to: the old way, the way of The Idea, and the way of the metaverse. To the pre-scientific or Poetic Age, the triumphant Age of Science, and to our present Age of Anxiety. Man, ever more naked, comfortless and alone, stands before the mindless, deathless titans: Nature and History. His choice: dominate the cosmos, or let it crush him like an unseeing boot crushes a bug. Man must control the veering forces of History or be swallowed by the meaningless evil of failing to walk its arc. That arc must even be bent to man's will.

Thanks to technology man's power has certainly grown, but the dream of ideal social order and political equality seems ever beyond his reach. Despite rivers of reason and monsoons of mockery, superstition and error continue to plague humanity. Though Divine laws have lost their sway, and human will, man's creative power, is the acknowledged and final authority, one thing only has proven susceptible to complete and absolute subjugation — Art.

This has not been the work of any one man. Eagerness to be on the right side of History led painters into errors which destroyed painting, and existential anxiety led others to create those emblems of the triumph of the will, the Arts. Marcel Duchamp's imprudent quip — "I am an artist because I say I am an artist" — has emerged as the foundation not only of art, but of the metaverse itself. How strange, how almost biblically mysterious, that this small remark, this impudent jest, spoken by a man so dedicated to patient, private and circumscribed activities, is the cornerstone of what the human will can plausibly boast its most notorious success — Contemporary Art.

Duchamp was certainly original and an innovator. He experimented





with randomness by letting falling strings define a form—like da Vinci's cracks in the wall. He made 'Why Not Sneeze', a mysterious and suggestive object—like Cellini's saltbox (above). In the Poetic Age there



was alert delight for the surprise of the rich and strange. The Age of Science, the period of the Isms, crippled that aspect of art. Rococo was exuberant, Neoclassicism is staid and dowdy. Where, in that age of reason, do we find an Arcimboldo, a Bosch, a Goya or a Fusseli, the haunting fantasy of Dominico Tiepolo's 'Amusements for Children' or Gothic wildness? One can point to Moreau's exotic dreams, Redon's hallucinations, the domestic felicities of Renoir and odd jokes of Dali and Ernst, but too much painting and sculpture of the 19th and 20th century is deadly serious, even dull, and too often grim, with unpleasant attitudes to match: doctrinaire conformities, anathemas and banishments. The fraternities of the middle ages protected their markets, their incomes, but in the 20th century it is ideological purity that is guarded.

Since it had never been tried before, David and the Neoclassics could forgivably believe they were forging a new

'Queen's Pawn Crowned', Aaron Kurzen, circa 1960, plaster, metal.

world. Their 20th century epigones claimed to be anti-establishment, to be fighting the academy. But Neoclassical academic principles were dedicated to the same god, the god of revolutionary progress. If those Modernists were right to rebel, Duchamp was even more right to rebel against them, to reclaim the happy freedom of the Age of Poetry.

Aaron Kurzen, who drew a mustache on Duchamp, also made a portrait of him as pope of the New Art — pawn of the queens, crowned with the miter of his own found-object. This sculpture tells us everything about Duchamp's consecration we need to know, and more than words can, or today dare tell. But if Duchamp is not the pope of Contemporary Art, what is he? He was certainly a man of his time, of the 1910s and '20s, one among many significant dadaists and Surrealists. Why does the sacrosanct law against "going back" to old ideas and styles not apply to Duchamp,

much of whose work is now over a century old?

If David, by his doctrines and encouragements, may be held responsible for the errors of the academy, Duchamp — who held himself so aloof and, in his subtle, ironic and self-deprecatory way, tried to alert and caution those who misused his example — should not be held responsible for what goes on in his name. What, then, of his gigantic influence? In our present situation, can or should we look to Duchamp?

Like German Expressionism, like Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism and Social Realism, dada is part of the story of Modernism, and that story, for as long as memory serves, may be for us—should painting happily revive—a cautionary tale of how the struggle to win free from the snares of disembodied thought, cloud-gazing theory and non-artistic influence, may only entangle us further. It is the story of an heroic disaster, and Duchamp is one of its more colorful characters. His work, surprising,



intriguing and amusing, may be of no use as an example, but many of his attitudes could be. He was sincerely devoted to art for its own sake, not as an avenue of self-promotion, and certainly not as existential justification. Though — for reasons related to attitudes and activities of his time — he did reject optical, or thoughtless art, his artistic ideas were refreshingly open. Like Hogarth he embraced humor. Like Reynolds he was open to surprise — his reaction to the breaking of the 'Large Glass' reminds us of how Reynolds urged openness to accidental occurrence. He used multiple influences: he mixed Cubism and Futurism, as Fragonard mixed southern and northern sensibilities. He enjoyed tricks and mystery, like Holbein's anamorphosis or the reflected image in 'Las Meninas' by Velásquez. His private game, his search for things without beauty or ugliness, was a way of getting to know himself. It was self-development, a way to be more in touch with the world, beauty and art. For Duchamp artistic activity was its own reward. He never sought laurels, and when he got them never rested on them. He never fell into routine, nor was he a compulsive worker. His quiet, secluded and modest way of life devoted to thought was that of true vocation.

To understand drawing and composition I engaged in a struggle which lasted 20 years. I didn't see the parallel with Duchamp's search for objects without artistic affect, but I do now. It was useful to Duchamp that the world eventually rewarded him for his found-objects, though the world has misunderstood and misused them. The cult of the found-



object as art, designated by an artist who designates himself as such, means that the artist is also a found-object. But rightly understood, the idea of the found-object is an addition to the vocabulary of art. There is now a great deal of assemblage sculpture using found-objects, almost all of it depressingly hokey. Done in a genuinely duchampian spirit, however, it can be marvellous. Aaron Kurzen could fill the most unlikely objects with meaning by merely looking at them.

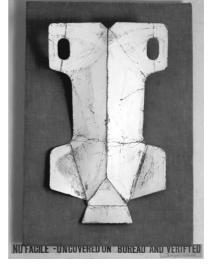
'Legend' (circa 1963 chair leg, gold paint, frame) is, to begin with, a multi-layered

pun. This framed yet airien, gracile object is an apotheosis of industrial detritus — Marilyn Monroe came to the same end. 'Nu Facile', another multi-layered pun (1954, shirt cardboard and newspaper clipping) scolds an aspect of Modernism while evoking the Belvedere Torso. Art or not art, these pieces carry conviction. Like Duchamp, Kurzen associated wordplay with his work. A found-object does not become art by designation, or by cobbling it together with other stuffs. It becomes what it is through a transforming vision, like the alchemical language of drawing.

Just as we should not imitate Expressionism, so we should not imitate Duchamp, just as Duchamp did not imitate himself. If we should not "go back" to Expressionism or dada, we might be enriched by Expressionist and dada attitudes. When I was fifteen I longed to be an 18th century painter, but if I was anything it was an Expressionist — Expressionism was the painting-air I breathed. Now I aim for The Style, but everything I have ever put into painting is still with me. We can, and should, look to older manners, but particular circumstances made each manner of painting what it was. If painting can legitimately overflow its banks in certain directions, the difference between the schools and the Isms is that where the schools are like a broad river flowing majestically to the sea, the Isms are dammed, channeled, engineered and polluted by artistically problematic factors which flood them destructively into areas too illustrative, decorative, inconsequential or evil.

People can imitate anything they like, but they might understand and

recognize that they are not aiming at true painting. In any case things should be called by their right names. Evoked shamelessly at every turn, art has become a false god. We should selflessly devote ourselves to poetry, as Duchamp and the Modernists did. We should smash and flee the maze of ideology in which we are trapped and lost. The temple has been invaded by a vulgar mob hungry for status and gold. We should not join them. We should rebuke them. We should behave otherwise.



There is another artist who complicates our situation. His influence has been fading since the year of his death, but he was the most important, famous, successful and rich artist of the first half of the 20th century, or during the whole culminating period of Modernism, the culminating crisis of the Isms. I was very young but, constantly among painters, I absorbed, felt and lived the tremendous effect, the overwhelming charm of Picasso. Today it is impossible to feel how this charm once clouded the world like a blue and pink haze. I can no longer feel it myself, though I recall the experience as if it were a dream.

In 1999—I had already been living in France for nine years—Citröen came out with a new car, the 'Picasso', with Picasso's signature 'appliquéed' on the side in 3D letters. I believe I know how it was that not even a luxury car, but an everyman car, was given this odd name.

Since globalization began, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, mercantilist billionaires earn so much money they run out of places to put it. They also have taxes to avoid and money to launder. A solution to these



problems are light-weight, easily produced objects worth sums which can run into hundreds of millions. In 1991 there was a crisis in the art market — important works had not sold for predicted prices and a chill

fell on the art world. Vast fortunes were at stake. Auctions stopped and everyone held their breath. The market was thereafter carefully managed. Investors bought and sold from each other to maintain an illusion of stability, and the government intervened. Television specials were produced featuring, first Picasso, then other stars and glories of modernity, its Isms and Arts.

High-profile exhibitions were organized. The most notable was the 1998 show of Jeff Koons. The pieces were the property of French billionaire François Pinault (Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, etc., #28 in the hit parade of richest men in the world) and the show was hosted by the French Minister of Culture, Jean-Jacques Aillagon, in the chateau of Versailles. While Koon's work glittered in the glory of the Sun King, Pinault purchased Christie's, where the work was then auctioned.

I have no doubt that Citröen's 'Picasso' was part of this propaganda campaign. My first reaction was that the inventor of this trick must be

someone like me, who had experienced how Picasso's signature, or any line he drew, once had a magical quality, a hypnotizing power.

When Picasso died the magic dissipated. The moment is still vivid in my mind, as the Kennedy assassination or 9/11 is for those who lived those events. I was in my high school art room, standing at a table with other students. I was thinking about Picasso, feeling his magic which still penetrated my soul... and then, in the space of a few moments, it faded like a fleeing dream. The experience was sobering. That overwhelming fascination—it was gone! What had it been? A kind of drunkenness an hallucinate



'Potted Cactus', 24x16, oil on canvas, 1948, Aaron Kurzen

been? A kind of drunkenness, an hallucinatory state...

I once visited the painter Paul Resika at his studio and mentioned the

Tonce visited the painter Paul Resika at his studio and mentioned the type of Modernist painting Kurzen had done in the 1940s. Resika went to his racks and pulled out a painting that could have been by Kurzen, "We were all painting like that back then!" he laughed. When I asked Herbert Katzman about Picasso's influence, "Everyone painted that way" he scoffed, "it was to be cool." My father had also been influenced by Picasso, as I knew from his work, but he denied it, probably from shame or disgust. Kurzen told me he regretted being so influenced by Picasso because, finally, Picasso was cold: Kurzen wished he had followed Matisse instead. An important reason we see hardly any American painting from the 1930s and '40s, particularly by artists born in the '10s and '20s, is because people would prefer to forget work so involved with regrettable ideologies and worn-out fashions.

I can recall summers in the 1960s, when I had so much time to ponder and dream, thinking about Picasso, basking in the atmosphere of his work. By then people were no longer imitating him, but the power was still there; everything "modern" seemed permeated by it. Nothing since 1973 resembles the phenomenon. Mania for certain pop-music or political stars is personal, a crush, and doesn't last half a century. It is impossible to know but I doubt there has ever been such a thing in painting before, though perhaps the reaction to Michelangelo, Raphael or Titian

was similar. Perhaps enthusiasm for certain saints during their lifetimes, or adulation of men like Napoleon, Caesar, and Alexander the Great. But the vogue of Picasso was not about him personally, he was not necessarily appealing in that way. It was his work which enchanted, like the music of the Pied Piper. The only thing similar in my own experience is the Beatles. My young self was rather puritanical; I did not appreciate rock'n'roll which I found crude, insipid and immoral, though it now seems innocent and pretty by contrast with what has followed. But, like everyone else, I could not help feeling their permeating influence which, however, as a significant factor, had dissipated before 1973.

"Modern art" — as people call it — survived the crisis of 1991. It was the first case of "too big to fail". I have no idea what effect Citröen's gesture had, but an organized effort, with governmental support, was certainly made, and Picasso was central to it. Though he remains a major star of Modernism, it is a star that has faded. Picasso no longer has importance to painting. But nothing has importance to painting, because painting no longer has importance. But whatever the value of Picasso's work to painting itself, whatever its intrinsic artistic qualities, as a phenomenon Picasso was centrally significant to the adventure of Modernism in the 20th century.

Picasso was a major talent. Talent, artistic gifts, are considered a value, it is the theory of genius. Certain persons are marvelously gifted and therefore their art is great. When art is understood as a function of pure, native talent, education becomes suspect because it imposes meaningless conformities which smother gifts. But it is not gifts that count, it is what one does with them.

Many stories are told about Picasso, and he told many stories about himself, but just as Duchamp was a trickster so Picasso was a showman, and these stories often contradict each other. There are two, however, which I think deserve credit. It is said Picasso felt he could not live up to the old masters so he invented less demanding ways of painting that allowed him to compete with them. And of himself he said that he was a public entertainer. I will not offer an analysis of each of Picasso's protean periods and manners, but beyond what they individually reveal about his powers and limits, as a whole they show a determination to remain at the "cutting edge of social evolution". But the ambition to do great work is incompatible with the ambition to stay on top, because at any particular time the

best work is not necessarily the most popular work. If Rembrandt had followed fashion, what we value most—his late work—would never have been made.

A painter should be judged by his best work. I do not wish to devalue Picasso, whom I admire. But there is something pitiable in his hunger to always be the pace setter and to maintain his international star status. He did nothing without a certain strength but he did much that is compulsively hasty and arrogantly confident in strategies which never had enough meat in them to interest him, or anyone else, for more than a few years. Braque, away from the Cubist academy, and with consistently interesting results, stuck with Cubism and developed it. Though Picasso was not a person of much integrity, in his defense he did stick with the second wave. Certain of his Cubist works verge on pure abstraction, but he never abandoned representation. He was certainly a great lover of



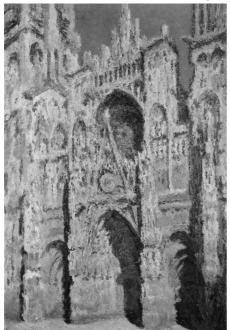
painting, but the relationship was strictly sexual. Picasso treated painting like he treated women, loving for a time and moving on. Willingness to truly give himself was missing. He loved fame and influence too much in a fast moving world. He did not serve painting, he made painting serve him.

But his attitude was not simply fickle. He was one of those Marxists who, unlike André Gide, made no effort to learn the truth, and did not abandon the faith after retaining it had become reprehensible.* Picasso was susceptible to The Idea, and the essence of The Idea, for painting,

^{*} By the 1950s it had long been abundantly clear that Stalinism was a repugnant tyranny.

was the doctrine of originality and the new. Picasso's major ambition was to incarnate that originality, to be the portal of emergent reality. Overmastered by The Idea, it eventually made a farce of his painting. His late work, from the '60s (page 165), though a sort of apotheosis of second wave craft, is crude, heavy-handed and disrespectful of subject, audience and painting itself. It is to painting what a battered woman is to marriage. Any line Picasso drew still sold for outrageous prices, but the world he wanted to impress had moved on. He was lost in a solipsistic dream where he was still piping the rats out of Hamelin, when all he was doing was printing money.

As a clear demonstration of an important part of the early modernist insight—the decorative aspect—second wave work, values and principles are useful to appreciate. But its look, its deviations from The Style, imitated today are only justification for weakness the second wave painters themselves would have found shameful. Second wave painting at its best—work, or aspects of the work, of such painters as Bonnard, Nolde, Matisse and indeed Picasso—can serve in this, our night of art, as guiding stars, but not necessarily as examples to follow in their superficial aspects. Without an overpowering, even smothering pressure from The



Idea, there could not have been such a thing as second wave Modernism, and the conditions for its viable and relevant existence will not reoccur in our era, if ever. The Style, however, is always viable.

The line of demarcation between the first and second waves, however, is not crisp. Cezanne, Gauguin and Matisse can fall into a zone of transition, as Cubism can be transitional between the second and third wave. There is also a transitional zone, or overlapping area, between first wave modernism (or true painting) and that academicism which Charles



Blanc called "the beginning of decadence", when he complained of "those modernities of painting" such as "search for effects".

The most famous manner of painting where the first wave and academicism overlap is Impressionism*. This overlap points to the problem of labels, and the difficulty of talking about painting in the terms we have inherited. By "Impressionism" I do not mean Renoir's violet colored grass done under the influence of Diaz, anything by Cezanne and Van Gogh, or many paintings by Pissarro. I do mean the Haystacks and Cathedrals of Monet — though not the Water Lillies. The Haystacks and Cathedrals, though very much early modernist (first wave) in their feeling for the materiality of paint and their obvious consciousness of parts of the decorative aspect, are also about light effects to a degree absent in anything by Renoir, but very present in Picot, whose 1817 'Cupid and Psyche' (above) continues to astonish, delight or repulse, depending on your perspective. Picot is also intent on tactile values, extreme finish and other qualities important to Neoclassicism, with which Monet had nothing to do. But with his Cathedrals, Monet was interested in a certain kind of light effect — depending on full sunlight — where the bright colors which interested the Impressionists come into play. There are no bright colors in Picot. He achieves his effects by strictly controlling values and intensities, a nuanced "French" approach, different from the exaggerated use of black by the Italian Caravaggesques in their quest for effect. Monet's Cathedrals are

^{*} Symbolism would be another, or the work of painters like Whistler and Moreau. The examples are legion.

not academic but they do overlap with the illustrative academic concern with effect. This is not to devalue the Cathedrals, but recognizing this can help us understand what acutally occurred in the 19th century, as part of a reflection on the proper place of illusion in painting.

The Water Lilies are truer painting than the Cathedrals because their concern with illusion does not overwhelm other considerations. The Cathedrals are wonderful, just as Picot's 'Cupid and Psyche' is astonishing. We can appreciate everything they achieve, while simultaneously understanding how they become concerned with things outside the proper domain of true painting.

Picasso said of Monet, "He's only an eye, but what an eye!" and one could say of Picot, "He's only an illustrator, but what an illustrator!" Compare Picot to Poussin, and Monet's Cathedrals to Renoir's 'Two Young Girls at the Piano' (opposite) to measure the distance by which painting too much about effect falls wide of the mark. True painting is where everything implied by the decorative and illustrative aspects can be expressed as fully as possible, such that they augment each other rather than cancel each other out. 1+1=3.

One might object that this standard is arbitrary, that any approach is artistically valid and should be appreciated for what it is. But such an attitude abstracts from the realities of painting, realities understood and cherished during the period of the schools and revived by the early modernists. But why should we limit ourselves to standards now hundreds of years out of date? Are we not free to invent our own standards, cherish our own values, new ones we have created for ourselves? This is the position of the metaverse. In the actual world we are confronted with realities which are unpleasant in the measure they are barriers to the mastery — and rewards for that mastery — we cannot help desiring. A desire for something without substance, however, can never be gratified.



BEAUTY and PAINTING

Art is not about aesthetics, and aesthetics are not about beauty. Art is a certain kind of expression, and many kinds of things can be expressed, some not beautiful. Yet there is a relation between art and beauty.

Words are worthless if they don't mean some particular thing, and they mean nothing if they mean anything and everything. The metaverse drains words of hierarchical implication. The word beauty implies lower categories — plain and ugly — but discriminatory distinctions are out when everyone has the right to be whatever they choose, and anything gets to be beautiful.

There is a Roman story about an artist whose audience applauded when he imitated the honking of a goose. Thinking to mock the artist, a peasant hid a goose under his cloak but the actual goose honks had no success. Imitating a goose is art, an actual goose is not. Manzoni put his signature on people to turn them into art—a now forgotten gag. A play about murder, 'Macbeth' for instance, is art. Actual murder is horrible and traumatic. Striptease resembles theater in some ways, but its relationship to the real thing is different from the relation of 'Macbeth' to actual murder because, in some ways, striptease is the real thing. The relationship of striptease to theater is like the relationship of illustrative painting to true painting.

Pornography is illustrative. An illustration is, or is trying to be, the thing itself: a reproduction of the subject, producing it again. Rorschach tests not withstanding, decoration has no meaning. It is, properly speaking, aesthetic. If Abstract Expressionism is personal expression, it is only



in the sense that fingerprints are. True painting is poetic: showing the outward it reveals the inward, more like handwriting. The human body might excite sexual desire, but there is more: its growth, the ills to which it is heir, and it is the temple of a soul. A poetic and sympathetic attitude sees that. A nude, a reclining female in particular, is necessarily erotic, but it is only pornographic when the intent is prurient, when the vision is narrow and instrumentalizing.

Huge mountains at sunset, mighty waves crashing against cliffs, a herd of bison thundering across the plain, these are magnificent and awesome. Kittens and small children are adorable and excite tender feelings. Any particular thing — an old chest of drawers in a junk shop — reaches towards us with a message. Anything might pluck the chords of memory and association, of hope and desire, of fear, sorrow or joy. The only exceptions, at least for Marcel Duchamp a hundred years ago, are a bottle rack and a snow shovel, but today those two things will have associations for us, because of him. Neither of those things in themselves, nor our reactions to them, is art. Art is what the poet expresses to us about things, about their inwardness, through their outward aspect. It is not that the poet sees more. Everyone knows the honking of geese, but the artist expresses it. Imitating the honk, the mere sound, is artful; it is art but not yet poetry — tragic or comic.

There is more to a honk than the sound, as there is more to a person than a body. It is this more which is the domain of poetry, which all poetic souls sense, artist or not. The haunting call, the angry cackle, the plaint, the joyful tumult. When the joy, the plaint, the anger, whatever is inward is expressed, art becomes poetry.

The word beauty is a label for a certain kind of admiration; admiration which can be neither withheld nor analyzed. To begin with, it is admiration for the beauty of women. The poet is awakened — the wind in trees like the wind in hair, the curve of the branch, the swelling of the hill, the blush of the sky. Recognized by association, new beauties lead to further awakenings, until the whole world is transformed, and the ecstatic poet, in a divine vision, sees beauty everywhere. It is then that there is beauty in sadness, pain and even death.

Were it not for the beauty of women, if the forms in question inspired nothing, or even disgust—and why not? the attraction cannot be explained aesthetically!—there would be no life. Eros, oldest and most

powerful of the gods, ordains that one thing go towards another: the rain to the earth, the flower to the sun, the butterfly to the flower. The arrow of Cupid points to beauty.

The essence of ourselves, the substance of our humanity, is our inwardness. We are called to our bodies by its pleasures, pains and demands. But there are other calls; hearing them we forget our bodies. Carried off by enthusiasm or misery, love or hate, we use and abuse our bodies without a care. But the body too has inwardness: pumping blood, digestive processes, sickness and healing. We live in and with our bodies as we live in and with our environment: contact with ground, air, sun and rain. Clouds, like the calling of birds, have their inwardness.

The miracles of science, the shining glamour of our thaumaturgical toys, so impress us that we forget the inwardness of things. In our pride for the mountains we move, the fine alloys of our fiery alembics, we forget ourselves. Peeking at the dark side of the moon and the ocean floor may not be doing us any good but it is certainly a mighty distraction. Lost in a labyrinth of delicious power, measuring, classifying, managing human resources — as if people were a liquid — we see ourselves as machines, and deal with our impulses and appetites in mathematical and procedural terms: for every problem a therapy, for every illness an injection, for every injustice a policy and a subsidy. Fascinated, auto-hypnotized, we have blindly built a Procrustean bed upon which we eagerly throw ourselves. Distribution centers, communication hubs, exit ramps and speed bumps, solar panels and electric grids, prescription medications, dietary regimens, demographics and death-rates, codes, restrictions and video surveillance, economic adjustments, regulations and governance. Even war, once an art, has become a game, played behind a screen with a joystick.

The first real-world effort to realize The Idea, the French Revolution, was confounded with Neoclassical painting and its antique associations, because a great hope, then as now, was the ideal of direct democracy. The revolutionaries hoped to reestablish an Athens or a Sparta in 18th century France. An observer of the revolution pointed out "the incompatibility of modern life and direct democracy. Modern life takes place in conditions other than antique life", he wrote, "the conditions of modern life are: the great size of the states, the division of work, the suppression of slavery and the emphasis on comfort; in Athens and Sparta conditions

were exactly the contrary."* Two hundred and Forty-one years later this observation is more apropos than ever.

Behind the ideal of direct democracy is the desire of each person to decide for himself, to be master not slave, or at least to have a say. Calls for direct democracy express an understandable desire for self-determination, happiness, leisure or pleasure. The call might be inspired by noble aspirations, or it might arise from low or criminal hungers, cloaked in willingness to cooperate, in fine phrases about the common good. Wise and good men may speak those phrases sincerely, but behind every "Democratic Republic of the People" are foolish, evil and insincere men.

States are bigger than ever, the division of labor more pronounced. Despite the massive use of slaves—the new sort that globalization and immigration favor — our comfort, our standard of living, is declining. A desire for more direct democracy, or even a return to something closer to the representative democracy of the 20th century, seems more and more futile, for it is not only Everyman who is empowered by the metaverse, the great of this world are as well. With technology and global organization you don't have to be the emperor of Rome to be a Nero or a Caligula. In the metaverse individual truths, which might be private perversities, can all flourish together. Destruction of the past in the name of freedom, and the cyborgization of humanity in the name of salvation, are underway — they are contradictory goals, already partly achieved. At worst they will culminate in the criminalization of art. Poetry, the inner, essential and true meaning of things, is a foul, organic tissue, incompatible with the perfect machine. It upsets smooth and efficient functioning by calling humanity back to what it truly is.

Perfection is not of this world, so our new gods will not have things all their own way. But for the common ruck things will certainly get worse before they get better. The diminution of comfort is, in part, due to the collapse of technology, itself a consequence of the decadence of science. The metaverse is an adverse condition for science because of its ban on objectivity. But the decadence of science and the retreat of technology, while they certainly mean disaster for some, might mean a more human world for others. A more human world, however, is not an unqualified good. The crisis of marriage and family is mainly due to the wealth and power that allow us so much independence. If we don't have to put up

^{*} Dutard, from a note in section V, chapter III of book VI of 'The Origins of Contemporary France' by H. Taine

with each other, why should we—particularly when technology fills interpersonal needs? The constraints of poverty may be a moral teacher for some, and the freedom of wealth may corrupt, but it is as difficult to tolerate others in wealth as in poverty, poverty only makes not doing so more costly. But were we to work more with our hands, be more in touch with the non-virtual world, it must strengthen poetic feeling.

Destruction of art of the past has become fashionable. We are beginning to see frenzies to match the French Revolution and the 8th and 9th century Iconoclasts. The doctrine of emergent reality, and the environment of the multiverse, both tend that way. Sinister measures, against which clairvoyant men have long railed and warned, may be implemented for the sake of planetary control but, one way and another, humanity is likely to survive. It is impossible to predict how the situation will develop but it is pointless to wait for improved conditions. If painting is to be revived it must happen in the teeth of whatever our situation happens to be. It was the painters who brought painting down. It will not be patrons, governments, the public, or society, but painters themselves who will bring it up.

A revival of art might contribute to a more human world, but art cannot be revived in order to make that contribution. Art is a function of a poetic attitude not an instrument of salvation, not therapy, personal or social. It is not art that will put humanity into painters, but humanity in painters that will allow art's reemergence. The painters who might achieve this will begin with an orientation conducive to doing so. That orientation corresponds to the human world, to attitudes which prevailed in the time of the schools. They are not necessarily identical to the attitudes of centuries ago, but they correspond to them. It is not impossible to be so oriented, for there are painters who have maintained these attitudes through the era of the Isms, and even into the era of the Arts. It is a minority attitude, but strength is not required to maintain it because desire for poetry and a love of beauty require no strength. They are a way of seeing, a way of being. Strength may not be needed but true desire and sincere love can be difficult to attain, as the prevalence of false loves and perverse desires show. The art of drawing must be fostered—so, too, must an orientation to beauty.

The greatest barrier to poetic feeling, and sensitivity to beauty, is not selfish desire for power over the world, but the proud and sad convic-

tion that our consciousness is merely a wisp of virtual foam, a moment of iridescent reflectance on the cold, hard surface of the cosmos, a cosmos made of only one of the original Greek elements: irreducible grains of earth. This reduction of everything to dead stuff was not postulated even by the pre-Socratics, but in our new cosmogony even the other elements — water, air and fire — are made of those hard grains.

By what right do we assume our bodies are constructed of stardust while our minds, which encompass all space and all time, are only fleeting strangers in an infinity of non-consciousness? Our consciousness is what we truly are. We might lose our limbs, our eyes, ears and tongues, but it is only when we lose our minds, our sense of self, that we are no longer ourselves. Why do we not conceive that what is first for us is first for the cosmos as well?

A slave without a soul gives our conscience no trouble, and a cosmos of clay is nothing but our tool. When the cosmos is a tool we are gods who exist not in-relation but in-ourselves, autonomously. It is this existential status, not power, that truly counts. The power is only a sign, a proof. Before the modern age, each hill, stream and tree was alive and the nymphs and naiads who were their souls were persons like ourselves. Man dared not do unto others what he would not have done unto himself, and use of the world demanded respectful sanction. With awe the ground was dug, beasts and trees harvested, water channeled. The spectacle of the sky, the abundant earth and teeming seas, were happy gifts of generosity, personal gestures, not mere elemental configurations. The world is not enchanted, it is alive in the same way we are alive. Does not the mysterious vastness of creation suggest a consciousness vaster than our own? Why is it seen as cold, empty and uncaring, and not there for us? Suicide, now a human right, was a sin when life was understood as the greatest gift. Life, even in our inevitable suffering, is all and everything. Sadness, now a crime committed by society against each individual's right to satisfaction, used to be a trick of the demons to turn us away from the gift of the joy of life. Mortality itself, which renders that gift infinitely precious, should be celebrated — and indeed it is: with birthdays and wakes! Even in the age of anxiety these sacred rites of original religion persist. With each sip of water we still affirm and sanctify our lives.

Is relapse into primitive, autarkic conditions and superstition required for revival of art? Sir Isaac Newton himself was a student of theology and astrology, so it is possible, even for the most enlightened, to study the workings of the world and yet marvel at its mystery. Not science, not knowledge of the world, but enslavement of knowledge and of the world, turns science sour. Modernity is a rapist not a lover. The lust in its stone heart thrives in the cold. Globalized resource-control in over-drive covers its crimes in the gleeful gold of its unprecedented power. Participation in this festival of destruction, this instrumentalization of everything for the sake of a parade of pride, is death to poetry. We are gods, but we are sad gods.

If we understand life in terms of death, or consciousness in terms of unconsciousness, there is nothing to see in anything, nothing to express, and painting is empty. But matter is mind in action, and everything is filled with inwardness, everything is alive.

How, in practice, should painting be revived? What, exactly, should painters do? What should they paint? Called modern, Delacroix insisted he was a classic. Accused of repeating the past, he said that "what the masters have already done has not been done enough!" — as if being born, loving, working and dying were things too old fashioned to repeat.

For those with eyes to see, nothing is more beautiful than a beautiful painting, and only true painting is painting properly speaking. The salvation of art will be by beautiful painting. But painting can be good as art, and yet be evil. True painting should not comfort the enemy. The enemy is the orientation destructive not only of art but of everything. The expulsion of the poets from the ideal city of Plato's 'Republic' is not a policy recommendation but an episode in a comical tale about how perfect justice is a logical absurdity. Plato's parable is a recommendation to artists — Plato himself was one — to be responsible to his fellow men.

Platonic social responsibility is different from art instrumentalized by The Idea. The latter is pro-regime propaganda with a view to a man-made earthly paradise. Art and society are in tension — Athens condemned Socrates to death. Seeing beauty everywhere, seeing the inwardness of everything, is not smoothly compatible with social order. The love between Romeo and Juliet is a picture of a reality that is a constant source of social disorder. Shakespeare's play shows the power of Eros to violate society, to bring chaos and destruction, to destroy even love's dream, yet it does not thoughtlessly celebrate that violation. It teaches lovers

about society, and society about love. Artists should follow the example of Plato and Shakespeare: if they can do no good, at least do no harm, encourage no evil.

For the six centuries of modern painting, to say nothing of the previous millennia — besides portraits, outdoor and indoor views (landscape, still-life, interiors) — painters were mainly concerned with illustrating the stories of religion and mythology. But any painting of lovers is, in essence, the story of Mars and Venus, Jacob and Rachel, even Mary and Joseph. There is a traditional trove of subjects which come to us out



of the mists of our pre-history. For millennia painters have used them with interest, success and originality. They resume all human experience. Very occasionally they might be enriched and enlarged upon, but Delacroix's 'Victory Leading the People' is only Nike, personification of victory, in a Phygian cap, brandishing a French flag. Eternal characters, like man himself, can always be put in modern dress.

Emergent reality doctrine, indifferent to the mystery that makes us what we are, pushes us to destroy it for the sake of a brave new world, the fate of which can only be quick destruction in the next emergent reality. It is a teacher of suicide.

The pigment range from bone black to flake white—the ten or so colors on a painter's pallet—like the limits of audible sound divided

by the twelve steps of the chromatic scale, like the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, are small vocabularies of infinite possibility which have sufficed to the needs of artistic expression since the dawn of time. The traditional set of painting subjects have likewise sufficed.

Merely maidens, daughters of Zeus-I respectfully think of them as the Great Ladies — the nine Muses are always, and still, there to guide and inspire, prehistoric yet eternally youthful. Artists pleasing to them will be blessed with inspiration for the greatest works, but however they choose to use us, we should all be their faithful lovers and servants. If the theory of creativity from the unconscious is destructive, it is not altogether wrong, for there is a part of art which is mysterious, whatever its source. There are things which happen in art that escape understanding. This is no excuse for neglecting the work of learning; study is like prayer. The apprenticeship of painting is long. Its problems are many and large. We can tackle them only one at a time, but then, mysteriously, they may be given to us together and whole. To make oneself beloved of the Muses is the work of the artist. Not our intentions, but their unknowable pleasure is what our art, if it is worthy the name, will be.



Contemplation of the Muses is always profitable. They are allegories of the nine modes of expression. There are no others, and knowledge of them expands expressive powers to infinity.

Calliope, in clear and strong voice, tells of heroes, scenes terrible and glorious, of triumph, splendor, riches and honor.

Polyhymnia, the pious sister, adores the divine and looks to the sacred mysteries.

Thalia, young and mischievous, leaps in with laughter and upside-down wit, bawdy, subtle, outrageous, rollicking or gentle, always charming and smiling.

Melpomene, melancholy, severe or mourning, watches over mortality, blindness and failure.

Euterpe, crowned with flowers, playing the double flute of the shepherds, spirit of meadows and copses, and the wilder places of nymphs and satyrs.

Erato, the lover, welcoming with succulent gifts, comforting and adorable.

Urania, watcher of the sky, the turning of seasons and stars, who looks to infinity.

Terpsichore the dancer, solemn, stately, quick or giddy, moving with the motions of each of her sisters.

Cleo, remembering and recording, her limpid spirit seeing all and knowing all — judges all and forgives all.

Society can do nothing for painting, nothing for art. It can work against it, but it always has and always will, and sometimes it is right to do so. Today it screams ART on every corner, commanding one and all to personal creativity. Conditions could hardly be worse. But painting can do something for itself. The great patrons—Julius II, Philip II, François I—did not inspire Michelangelo, Titian and Leonardo. It was Michelangelo, Titian and Leonardo who inspired them. Patronage is not the source of great painting, great painting is the source of patronage.

Realistically, immediately, painters — would be painters — could at least do something for each other, but not before they orient themselves by what favors painting. Education has collapsed but lack of technique is not our problem. It is not technique that gives rise to good painting. Technique is a function of intention. Painters will be given to do what they truly wish to do. Originality anxiety must be abandoned for love and devotion, the mysterious relation with the invisible that is the true source of art. Then painters, sharing true goals, reintegrating a human world, can encourage and guide each other.

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GLOSSARY OF JARGON

ACADEMICISM - painting as understood by the Neoclassics; methods and attitudes taught and practiced in the 19th century. Members of the academy sometimes had their own teaching 'ateliers', as did non-academicians. The teaching in these 'ateliers' was "academic" in different ways and to different degrees. Academicism was not monolithic; it had various currents and was influenced, more and less, by "Modernism". By the early 20th century "modernist" ideas were accepted by the academy.

ACADEMY (THE) - a French institution created in the 17th century to promote, teach and regulate art. It sponsored public exhibitions and prizes. In the 19th century it fell under the influence of Jacques-Louis David's revolutionary doctrines.

ANTIQUE - relating to antiquity, particularly Greek and Roman (800 B.C. to 600 A.D.).

AESTHETICS - a pseudo science which pretends to understand and qualify configurations of forms, colors, sounds, motions, or any sensory inputs, and also concepts.

COLOR - a quality with four aspects: in order of importance they are: value, temperature, intensity and hue. See page 116

CONTEMPORARY ART - the New Art that followed Modernism's "third wave". Contemporary Art is essentially Pop Art, but the term implies its protean off shoots. It dates, very roughly, from 1960, which also marks Modernism's speedy decline, or the collapse of the "third wave".

CULTURE - the ideas underlying this book imply a critique of this word as presently used (see page 156). It is put in single quotes in contexts where the contemporary usage becomes unreliable.

DRAWING (DRAFTSMANSHIP) - with regard to painting, drawing is a language for the expression of forms in space in the context of a page.

EARLY MODERNISTS - painters who looked to tradition to counter the ideological influence of Neoclassicism, e.g. Puvis de Chavanne, Degas, Manet, Renoir.

EARLY MODERNIST ANALYSIS - a theoretical understanding of painting developed by certain "first wave" modernists which uses the following three terms:

- 1: DECORATIVE ASPECT lines and colors as such, on the surface of a painting.
- 2: ILLUSTRATIVE ASPECT representation, but more importantly, whatever suggests space or depth.
- 3: TRUE PAINTING when the decorative and illustrative aspects function together properly, the result is "true painting" (1+1=3). The label "early modernist analysis" is mine, but the terms "decorative", "illustrative" and "true painting" were invented by 19th century painters.

FIGURE - a human or animal body; a thing represented (i.e. figured); the lines or shapes which define a subject. The sense of "figure" and "form" overlap: the former is more related to the illustrative aspect, the latter more to the decorative.

FORM - a term with several related meanings, determined by context but so related that using separate terms would lead to confusion.

1: volume, 2: shape understood two-dimensionally or also three-dimensionally, 3: the overall disposition of a painting or an element of that disposition such as a figure.

FIRST WAVE MODERNISM - the way of painting practiced in the early 19th century by painters who, rejecting Neoclassisism's revolutionary strictures and goals, clove to traditional methods and attitudes.

IDEA (THE) - a term borrowed from Dostoevsky: hopes and plans for every flavor of man-made paradise.

META-FORM - "unities" more or less subliminally perceived as forms; a compositional dynamic of true painting. See page 120 & etc.

METAVERSE - a situation of virtual relations, not necessarily through a technological interface, where thoughts, feelings, and to the greatest extent possible even physicality, suffer no constraints.

MODERN PAINTING - even in the 1960s this term could still mean painting since the 13th century, or post Byzantine painting initiated by Cimabue and Giotto. That usage has disappeared today, but occurs in these pages.

MODERNISM - a confusing misnomer, now inescapable, which covers a diverse movement, beginning in the early 19th century with certain conservatives or reactionaries: the "early Modernists"

MULTIVERSE - the simultaneous and contiguous existence and validity of incompatible "truths" and "realities".

NEOCLASSICISM - modern painting had always been fascinated by antiquity, but archeologists, theorists and painters in the mid-18th century gave this fascination a new impetus; the resultant Neoclassical style quickly became entangled with French revolutionary ideology.

NEW ART (THE) - the term "contemporary art" can seem to mean the current manifestation of art. "New Art" suggests the actuality of something original or unprecedented. A more adequate term, like "Pseudoart", must await wider understanding of the phenomena in question.

NON-OBJECTIVE - non-representational, "abstract" or purely formal painting, which shows or illustrates nothing.

PRIMITIVE (ART) - until mid-20th century this term was used to qualify pre-Renaissance Western painting. Duccio (1255-1318) but also Giovanni di Paolo (1403-1482) Piero della Francesca (1415-1492) and even Masaccio (1401-1428) were known as "Italian Primitives".

SECOND GENERATION ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM - a form of Contemporary Art which apes Abstract Expressionism, Modernism's final expression. It is pseudo "third wave" Modernism because no longer based on drawing and Modernist teaching. See page 126.

SECOND WAVE MODERNISM - a manner of painting initiated in the mid-19th century, which emphasizes the decorative aspect (e.g. Cezanne, Gauguin, Picasso).

STYLE - the manner in which a thing is done. Presently this word tends to imply what is done as much as how it is done, an implication absent from this text.

STYLE (THE) - the manner native to the language of painting.

SUBJECT - what is represented in a painting; e.g. a person, a landscape, a person in a landscape, etc.

THIRD WAVE MODERNISM - abstraction, or emphasis on the decorative aspect to the point of eliminating representation, e.g. Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Hofmann. First, second and third wave modernist painting are generally sequential in time, but there is much overlap, and some painters switched from one to another. These approaches, as well as the academic approach, persist even today though only residually. The first wave approach aims at true painting strictly speaking. The relationship between the decorative and illustrative aspects is progressively compromised in the second and third wave approach.

TONAL PAINTING - an approach based on values, more or less ignoring other aspects of color, in order to achieve certain effects.

TONE - values, or dark and light.

UNITY - a form, or area of color or value, or related elements, that function compositionally. See chapter 6.

VALUE - the lightness or darkness of a color.

... an articulate description of art's fundamental principles. Written with wit and humor, this is a book that anyone, practicing artist or layman will find insightful. Chris Alles

Paul Rhoads gives us a unique vision, culled from a liffetime of scholarship and artistic experience, of how we got to where we are now in the world of Art. Whether you agree with his argument or disagree with it, this is a must read for those interested in a wellarticulated and highly persuasive perspective. Richard Leiter

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